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have been trying to uncover, the lesser motifs and subordinate elements of the patterns could be interpreted in different ways, at various times, by those who regularly saw them at close quarters. Probably that is another reason why the mosque officials and the common people preferred rugs with the simpler, abstract designs, in contrast to the more representational patterns favored by the kings, nobles, and courtiers, who sponsored the Palace Art.

The people who designed and wove the village rugs or tribal rugs generally came from the most conservative and most actively religious or superstitious stratum of Islamic society. By contrast, the designers of the Palace carpets had more freedom, not being so rigidly bound by religious prejudices and legalistic strictures—though they might have been more truly religious in a higher sense, since many of them were Sūfīs. In the next article we shall see how fundamentally the Sūfī concepts influenced the Persian rug patterns; but the ideas and values of the humbler designers and weavers had a far wider effect on the patterns of Islamic rugs in general, so our first steps toward trying to understand the meanings in the patterns had to concentrate mostly on the products of their more pious, but less sophisticated minds.

SYMBOLIC MEANINGS IN ORIENTAL RUG PATTERNS: Part II

Schuyler V.R. Cammann

The Cultural Background for the Great Persian Carpets

In Part I we examined only the most abstract types of symbols on the Oriental rugs, concentrating on those relating most directly to ideas from the religion of Islām. In tracing these, we tried to sense the basic, underlying feeling behind Muslim thought as it has influenced Islamic Art in general and rug designs in particular, and we also saw how the total pattern—both field and border—was considered as a single entity. This has given us a general frame of reference, and now we can go on to discuss some individual symbols, or symbol groups, of more specific types, less directly reflecting the teaching of the Prophet.

Islām was the latest of the great world faiths. Its initial date goes back to the year of the *Hijra*, Muhammad's flight from Mecca to Medina, in 622; thus A.D. 622 is A.H. 1.¹ All the great religions have drawn from pre-existing ones, and this is no exception. Anyone who dips into the Koran must immediately be impressed by the frequent references to the Hebrew Prophets and to Christianity.² However, remnants of beliefs and traditions from still older religions and more distant cultures also continued on, especially in Iran, which had enjoyed an extremely high civilization for more than a thousand years before the coming of the Prophet.³ Thus, it is no accident that the most complex expression of Old Asian symbolism on the rugs is to be found on those from Persia, especially the ones from the early Safavid Dynasty, in the 16th and early 17th centuries of our era.

Some of the older European scholars who did so much of the early study on Islamic rugs used to say that, because the Persian rugs of this period are so very complex, they probably represent the culmination of a long period of carpet-designing, the products of which are now lost and can no longer be traced back or reconstructed, and therefore these superb carpets must represent the end of a design tradition, just before its ultimate decline. The trouble with this theory is that the miniature paintings from earlier periods fail to show us rugs with any such patterns. These complex designs suddenly appear in the early 16th century, and such great feats as the Ardebīl carpets and the "Imperial hunting rugs," actually represent the beginning of a great design tradition, rather than a culmination before decline.

More recent Western writers have demonstrated that the very complex, well-organized patterns on the early Safavid rugs marked a new departure, characterized by a radical change in patterns, both in style and in subject matter, and

they usually ascribe this to the fact that these splendid rugs were being produced for the rulers of the new dynasty by court artists and miniature painters who had more sophisticated ideas about decoration.⁴

Actually both sets of theories are partly true and partly false; in any case, they are inadequate to account for the forms and the complexity of the Safavid carpet patterns. In the first place, the latter were indeed products of a long tradition; but, as far as we know, that tradition had not been so openly expressed in designs on previous rugs. In the second place, although one might expect a change in art styles under the new class of professional court artists, this would hardly account for the profound *ideological* change in subject matter, with its strong emphasis on another strain of symbolism. Instead of the simple repeating patterns which seem to have been in vogue in Iran up to about 1500, and which persisted in Turkey long after, the new Persian carpets displayed strongly centralized patterns, or rich decorations of active scrolls and vines with colorful plants and unreal animals. All this indicates something far more radical than a mere change in style, it signalizes a completely different cultural outlook; and, when we study the social and political developments in Persia at that moment of history, we can see some of the reasons for this change of attitude.

The Old Persian culture of Sasanian times had been largely destroyed by the Arab conquest in the 7th century A.D., and it was gradually replaced by a more rigid Islamic cast of thought and way of life. This Arabized culture of Mediaeval Persia was in turn destroyed by Mongol conquerors during the 13th and early 14th centuries. However, the practical-minded Mongol overlords of Persia fully realized that they were primarily warriors and not effective as administrators, so they brought in Chinese officials to help them govern—just as Kublai Khan and his successors employed Persians, Arabs, and even Russians to help control China. These Chinese officials in Persia summoned artists and artisans from their homeland who could make things conforming to their own alien tastes, and the Chinese productions made a lasting impression on the reviving Persian arts. Later, during the reign of the Timurids, a predominantly Turkish dynasty, in the late 14th and 15th centuries, many Chinese elements were incorporated into the paintings and decorative arts in the areas now known as Russian Turkestan, Northern and Eastern Iran, and Afghanistan.

Then, at the beginning of the 16th century, Persia was conquered by a new dynasty, the Safavids (1500-1736). In spite of rather dubious genealogies which made the new king seem to be descended from Persian and Arabian royal bloodlines, he came basically from Turkic stock, and Turkish was the language of his court. Furthermore, he belonged to another branch of Islām, the unorthodox Shi'a sect, and—most importantly for our subject—like his

¹Many Westerners assume that since the Muslim religion began in A.D. 622, it is sufficient to add 622 to the Muslim date to get the Christian equivalent. This is not so, because the Muslim year is a lunar one, hence shorter than our solar year. See Part I, note 52, for a simple way to make the necessary calculations.

²Muhammad quoted Hebrew and Christian scriptures very frequently, because he believed that he was "completing" these older faiths in his new interpretation of the Will of God.—*Islām* means "submission (to God's will)"

³For some examples of the survival of pre-Islamic traditions in the area of Greater Iran, see S. Cammann, "Ancient Symbols in Modern Afghanistan," *Ars Orientalis*, Vol. 2, 1957, pp. 5-42.

⁴See Erdmann, pp. 31-32, for an expression of this theory.

father before him, he belonged to an order of Sūfī mystics. In fact, he sent his young son, the future Shāh Tahmāsp, to a distant city at the age of two, under the charge of a combined regent and teacher who would train him from the beginning in Sūfī thought and doctrines.⁵

The Sūfis, who held such strong influence in 16th century Persia, had already drawn ideas from India, and probably had enjoyed quite recent intellectual contact with the sub-continent during the preceding Timurid period, when relations between Iran and India were politically close; but they had further opportunity for direct contact with Muslim Indian thought when the Mughal Emperor Humayun was exiled to Persia from 1539 to 1555, during the reign of Shāh Tahmāsp, a period when some of the most famous of the Safavid rugs were made.

The Persian Sūfis of that period may have drawn partly from Indian thought their profound love of Nature, which they viewed as the production of a loving God who created natural beauty as a reflection of His own innate Beauty, on the mirror of the world.⁶ They also held a concept of the Universe in which the Center was considered to be a position enjoying special cosmic powers—an old Asian world-view which the Turks may have brought from their original homeland in Ancient China. And their poetry and teachings constantly referred to Paradise as a reward for the returning pilgrim; an idea which is stated repeatedly in the Koran,⁷ but which they made the core of their thinking. Their metaphysical Universe and their concepts of Paradise both incorporated trees, plants, and animals of a "perfect" or a fanciful (un-earthly) nature; and, since the rendering of plants and animals had developed under the influence of Chinese artists, it was natural to turn to Chinese prototypes and to make these even more fantastic in keeping with their extra-terrestrial setting. Lastly, and perhaps most significantly here, there was the Sūfī preoccupation with Light, and the Metaphysical Sun as the source of that light, so frequently symbolized by the old Central Asian "Sun-bird," who constantly hovers in the background of this art, in many guises.⁸

When these new racial and cultural, philosophical and religious outlooks combined in the rebirth of a strong native Persian art tradition, under the generous patronage of the rich and powerful new dynasty, it was natural that a new kind of decoration should appear on the carpets,

⁵The historical background behind the great Safavid carpets is neatly summarized by S. C. Welch, Jr., in "Two Shahs, Some Miniatures and the Boston Carpet," *Boston Museum Bulletin*, Vol. 69, 1971, pp. 6-14. (As I shall have to refer quite frequently to this issue of that bulletin, it will be abbreviated hereafter as "BMB, 69.")

⁶Plato taught that our world was but a mirror of the World Above, and this idea was strongly shared by many Muslim thinkers.

⁷The theme of Return to God is a frequent one in the Koran. Typical is this passage "To Allah belongs the kingdom of the Heavens and the Earth. To Him shall all things return," Koran, 24.42. See N. J. Dawood, trans., *The Koran* (a Penguin Classic), Baltimore, 1970, p. 213. For other examples, see M. M. Pickthall, *The Glorious Koran*, 7.29, 23.60, 30.11, 40.3 and 43, 43.14 and 85, etc. This is also the basic theme in Attar's famous poem "The Birds' Parliament," see FitzGerald's translation of this in *Persian Poems*, edited by A. J. Arberry, London and New York, 1954, pp. 160-170.

especially the fine ones destined for the court. New patterns incorporated Sino-Turkish and Old Iranian ideas about the structure of the Universe, containing Chinese plant and animal forms along with local Persian botany,⁹ and through and behind all this they displayed a considerable amount of Sūfī mysticism involving Paradise and Light. It was the difficult task of the court artists, working under the combined influence of all these new ideas from scattered sources to integrate the diverse concepts into consistent wholes. Though their resulting work—in paintings and on book-covers as well as on the palace carpets—shows a consummate sophistication, delighting by its fine details and play of subtle colors, all the basic ideas outlined above found full expression. They were portrayed so clearly that any man of that period could read them easily, and so can we, if we make the effort to put ourselves into the frame of mind of the people of that time.

In fact, the thought of the early Safavids as expressed in their arts was not confined to their period, or even to the duration of their dynasty. The ideas that were portrayed on their palace carpets survived the fall of their power, and reflections of them can still be seen on Persian rugs. We may find them particularly on the products of the tribal peoples of Iran, among whom the old traditions lingered on, comparatively free from the over-sophistication and fondness for change that infected the court and the rich townspeople, and also freer from the disintegrating influences of alien Western cultures. Although there are now probably very few people, even among the tribesmen, who can fully comprehend these long-persisting designs, the ideas themselves are still quite clearly expressed,¹⁰ and some understanding of them can add greatly to our enjoyment and appreciation of a fine Persian rug from any period.

Since the basic underlying structure of the patterns on the Safavid palace rugs was a view of the Universe, or a portion of it, our first task will be to examine the Old Asian ideas regarding the Universe, from which the artists were drawing their inspiration.

Old Asian Concepts of the Universe

Most fundamental among the earlier views that continued to flourish under the banner of Islām were beliefs concerning the structure of the Universe. Long before the coming of the Prophet, the various peoples of Asia had been making

⁸We have seen in Part I that the Sunbird was used in rug patterns with the idea of protection; but we shall soon see that it was a multivalent symbol, carrying many different meanings.

⁹The plants and animals will be discussed in some detail in Part III.

¹⁰Carl Schuster has pointed out that it was characteristic of traditional artists to repeat certain basic themes even when their meanings had been quite generally forgotten. He said, for example, "The persistence of symbolic designs after all memory of their meaning has lapsed is characteristic of popular tradition. We can hardly understand this phenomenon unless we assume that the forgotten meaning somehow lingers below the level of the conscious mind, from where it may, upon occasion be recalled into consciousness." See Carl Schuster, "Some Comparative Considerations about Western Asiatic Carpet Designs," *Artibus Asiae*, Vol. 9, 1946, pp. 85-86.

small models of the Universe to represent symbolically the arena in which human life and the life of the gods interacted. They did this in planning their temples, in which the contact between men and their gods were most directly realized,¹¹ and kings also built their palaces in this way, since they thought of themselves as ruling by divine sanction, as links between mankind and the gods, and they wished to emphasize that they were representative of the gods, ruling under supra-natural protection and with divine aid.¹²

Even the early Christian churches in Western Asia (and in Eastern Europe) had been constructed as "little universes," so, whether an Islamic mosque was built on the model of a Syrian, Armenian, or Byzantine church, or followed the plan of a Sasanian Persian palace, it, too, became a symbol of the Universe.¹³ On a smaller scale, this symbolism very early passed down into the designing of altars and thrones, royal robes and priestly vestments, bronze mirrors and other ritual implements, etc., and it extended down into the plan of tents and humble dwellings.¹⁴ So, naturally, it could be expected to appear in the patterns of rugs, as well, to find its most elaborate expression in carpets designed to be used by powerful rulers.

The peoples of Asia traditionally thought in terms of a three-level Universe. They pictured this as divided horizontally into three parts:¹⁵ first, the flat Earth, square or cross-shaped, and covered, or ceiled over, by the overarching Sky; beneath the Earth, was the shadowy Underworld, or Hell, the lowest level;¹⁶ while above the Sky was the third realm, Heaven.¹⁷ (Heaven, too, contained a number of graded levels—usually seven—but these were

¹¹Professor Baldwin Smith has amply demonstrated how the idea of a domed building as a kind of cosmic house could have sprung from an earlier cosmic tent. See E. B. Smith, *The Dome: A Study in the History of Ideas* (Princeton Monographs in Art and Archaeology, XXV), Princeton, 1971, pp. 79-85. See also Mircea Eliade, "Centre du monde, temple, maison," in *Le Symbolisme Cosmique des Monuments Religieux* (Serie Orientale Roma, XIV), Rome, 1957, pp. 57-82, and the first chapter of his book, *The Sacred and the Profane*, esp. pp. 20-29, 36-47 and 57.

¹²See Charles Wendell, "Baghdad: Imago Mundi," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 2, no. 2, 1971, pp. 103, 122, and 126, etc.

¹³For Christian ideas of a church or shrine as a cosmic house, see Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, pp. 52-56, and Smith, *The Dome*, p. 106, etc; for Old Persian ideas of the cosmic house, see Smith, *ibid.*, pp. 81-83.

¹⁴For examples of these ideas in East Asia, see S. Cammann, "The 'TLV' Pattern on Cosmic Mirrors of the Han Dynasty," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 68, no. 4, 1948, pp. 159-167, and also S. Cammann, "Mongol Dwellings: with special reference to Inner Mongolia," in *Aspects of Altaic Civilization* (Indiana University Uralic and Altaic Series, Vol. 23), edited by Denis Sinor, Bloomington, 1963, pp. 20-22.

¹⁵For the concept of the Three Worlds, see Pierre Gordon, *L'Image du Monde dans l'Antiquité*, Paris, 1949, pp. 39 and 107 ff.

¹⁶Higher thinkers in Asia considered this concept as a poetic metaphor. Many of them knew from personal experiences that Hell can be present within the individual, and sometimes, Heaven, too. This, in turn contributed to the view that each human being was himself a kind of Universe in microcosm: corresponding to the three-level division of Space, one's body consisted of the part below the waist, the upper torso, and the head; or—more spiritually—of Material Body, Mind, and Spirit, to be experienced in physical sensations, profound thought, and mystic ecstasy, respectively.

¹⁷J. A. MacCulloch, describing "Skyland" in *The Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. II, New York and Edinburgh, 1910, p. 686,

only subordinate parts of a single entity.¹⁸) They pictured the Sky that covered the Earth as a round disc or an inverted bowl, decorated with the "fixed stars," beneath which the Seven Planets (including the Sun and Moon) moved freely. The Sky was considered as rotating upon a central Cosmic Axis—a great mountain, a giant tree, or simply a column or post—which extended from the Underworld, up through the middle of the Earth, and through the center of the Sky, to or beyond the topmost layer of Heaven. However, the more sophisticated considered this Axis a spiritual connection with Heaven, hence invisible, and if they represented it in a material way they did so only as a kind of artistic metaphor. Most significant from the point of view of our symbol studies was the old belief that at the apex of the sky there was a door or gate leading into Heaven, beyond which dwelt God, or the gods. Through this "Sky-Door" they believed divine spirits could communicate with Man, provide him with energy, or constructively influence his actions.¹⁹

Since this basic plan of the Universe was three-dimensional, it obviously could be conveyed more effectively in the 3-D plan of a building than on a flat rug. But, as we have noted, in the Islamic World all the arts were inter-related, so it seems appropriate to show how this form of symbolism was expressed in terms of mosque architecture, before discussing it in more detail in relation to its application in carpet designs.

The Old Asian ideas of the Universe influenced the architecture of mosques in many ways. Most of the earliest mosques consisted of an open rectangular court, often having gates on three sides, while the fourth had the sacred chamber into which was later placed a niche like a blank gate, called the *miḥrāb*, facing Mecca. The center of the court was open to the sky, which formed a natural vault overhead, and the well or ablution fountain at the middle of the court could serve as a symbolic entrance to the Underworld. This type persisted on into modern times in the warmer Muslim lands;²⁰ but when the 'Umayyads, ruling from Damascus, began to copy the form of Syrian or Byzantine churches, the basic plan for a mosque became a dome fitting down over a square—symbolic Sky over symbolic Earth—and these domes, in particular, began to display other elements of design that further emphasized this Universe symbolism.²¹

refers to "belief in a happy world of other beings" in "the upper region, of which the sky seemed to be the floor." His section on the "Abode of the Blest" contains references to many of the ideas that we are discussing here.

¹⁸The Koran frequently refers to Seven Heavens, with the Throne of God above these, making eight divisions in the World above the Sky; see the Koran (Pickthall, trans.), 23.86, 57.3, and 71.15, for some examples. See also the reference in Part III, note 39.

¹⁹By far the best coverage of the "Sky-Door" is A. K. Coomaraswamy, "Svayamātrnnā: Janua Coeli," *Zalmoxis*, Vol. 2, 1939 (published 1941), pp. 3-51. See also his "Symbolism of the Dome," *Indian Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 14, 1938, pp. 1-56.

²⁰As I write, I recall the Friday Mosque in Old Delhi, as an extreme example of this plan: extreme because of its vast scale.

²¹Baldwin Smith, discussing this development, said that previous ideas of a dome-shaped cosmic house, derived from a tent, must have made the

A few mediaeval Islamic buildings from the Seljuq period, which still survive, have a hole or *oculus* in the domed roof, often directly above a well or fountain; and in such an arrangement the latter could definitely be considered as the lower counterpart to the Sky-Door, a gate into the Underworld below.²² Some of the Muslim baths retained this symbolism down to modern times—as did some Christian baptistries—but the mosques themselves did not preserve the open *oculus*. Instead, at the center of the ceiling in Ottoman mosques one finds painted conventionalizations of the Sky-Door;²³ while the great Persian mosques show even more splendid portrayals of the Sky-Door or the "Sun-Gate" at the center of elaborate medallions in their tile-lined domes—medallions which obviously relate to those on the carpets of the Safavid period and later.²⁴ Lastly, many mosques have, jutting above the apex of the main dome, a golden spike, usually transfixing three golden balls, and sometimes supporting another symbol as well. Though the original meaning of this finial is now quite generally forgotten, it once represented the idea of the Cosmic Axis, reaching up from the Underworld, through the middle of the Earth, to pierce the Sky and Heaven, too, to secure the entire Universe. While the spike was intended to represent just the top of this, the three balls were apparently added as reminders that the Axis linked "the Three Worlds" and provided a means of communication between them.²⁵

In view of all this rather explicit Universe symbolism, it seems rather ironic to note how Western students of Islamic Architecture are still so puzzled and confused about the plans of the great tomb-mosques of Iran, Central Asia, and Muslim India. Some of them have asked, rather plaintively, "Why were the coffins placed in a cellar or crypt under the floor, with only symbolic models of them in the main chamber?" and "Why did this principal room have such a flattened dome for its ceiling, leaving so much waste space between the lower dome and the tall outer one which towers so high above it?"²⁶ These questions obviously spring from

Arabs especially receptive to this form of symbolism. See *The Dome*, pp. 42-44.

²²For an early (11th cent., just pre-Seljuq) dome with a central hole, see Seherr-Thoss, *Design and Color in Islamic Architecture*, Washington, 1968, pl. 2, p. 29. For a late example (17th cent.) of a hole in a dome over a fountain, in a palace, see *ibid.*, fig. I, p. 205.

²³See *ibid.*, pl. 113, p. 289, for the ceiling of the Sokullu Mehmet Pasha Mosque in Istanbul.

²⁴See A. U. Pope, *Introducing Persian Architecture* (The Asia Institute's Library of Introductions to Persian Art), Shiraz, 1969, p. 91, showing a dome in the Shāh Mosque in Isfahan. For an example from Moghul India, see A. Volwahren, *Living Architecture: Islamic Indian*, pl. 117, showing the ceiling of the mosque at Humayun's Tomb.

²⁵Pope, *op. cit.*, p. 109, shows the spike atop the Madrasa Madr-e Shāh, in Isfahan. Seherr-Thoss, *op. cit.*, pl. 132, p. 286, and pl. 138, p. 298. This last example shows how smaller spheres are sometimes placed between the three principal ones, to relieve the length of an especially long axial-spike, but the smaller ones are mere "fillers" and do not alter the basic symbolism.

²⁶For example, see Volwahren, *op. cit.*, p. 53, right column, where he says, "Today we take exception to false constructions such as the double dome." In *ibid.*, p. 83, he tries to guess the reason for placing the tombs below, without suspecting the true, symbolic one.

a practical-minded, modern Western assumption that the only significant part of the building was the publicly-accessible main chamber. However, the key to the understanding of what is actually a cleverly integrated plan is right at hand in the ancient concept of the three-level Universe, which, until recently, was also implicit in the Christian view of the cosmos. The main room, accessible to men, represented our World; below this, in the symbolic Underworld, the deceased was placed to await the Day of Judgment; and above, beyond the ceiling which represented the Sky—the center of it usually marked by a conventional symbol of the Sky-Door—was the unseen space within the outer dome that represented Paradise beyond the Sky.

This blindness to the old Tradition, and this inability to see things as the old Asian architects and rug designers did, has been a major obstacle to hinder our full appreciation of their productions. It is difficult for us to understand their way of thinking, partly because modern Western man has to such an extent lost touch with his own ancestral Tradition and its particular symbols, and partly because we no longer tend to think in terms of metaphors and similes. (Note the misuse of the word "like" in ordinary conversation.) By contrast, the peoples of the Near and Middle East, and especially the Persians, were poetic-minded people, fond of metaphors and similes, particularly the interchangeable ones.

Thus, they spoke of "the dome of the Sky" (*gumbad-e azraq*, literally "the Blue Dome"), meaning, "The sky is like a dome"; but at the same time they build sky-domes on their mosques, as though to say, "the dome is like the sky; indeed it is the sky in miniature." Then they extended the idea to similarly-shaped things, such as the iron "dome" of a helmet, which they also considered as resembling the Sky. Only by learning to feel at home in this atmosphere of pictorial similes, or rebus-puns, can one begin to appreciate the meaning of the patterns on the carpets, which also drew from cosmic symbolism, including the symbolism on the domes—flattened out, of course.

But, conversely, the resemblance between dome and helmet, for example, was not just because of the similar functional shapes; it was more especially because of the inter-related symbolism. In Asian thinking the mosque was the Universe in miniature, a small edition of the four-square world covered by the over-arching sky; but they also considered a human being as a microcosm, and the top (or "dome") of his head was likened to the dome of the Sky; or more strictly to the arch of Heaven above the Sky (*gumbad-e 'azam*). Hence, the helmet which covered this was decorated with appropriate celestial symbolism: its neck-guard of chain mail was often decorated—by links of another colored metal—with a row of cloud-collar points to represent the Sky-Door below Heaven, while its central spike represented the tip of the World-Axis, like the spike protruding from a mosque dome.²⁷ In short, the modern

²⁷The Victoria & Albert Museum, South Kensington, has a particularly fine Persian helmet illustrating all this. For a Turkish variant, with highly developed Heaven-symbolism on its upper part, see *Art Treasures of*

symbol-seeker must know both the underlying cosmic symbolism as well as the poetic attitude with which it was employed, since both factors played their part in influencing Islamic design, including the patterns on the rugs.

It also improves our understanding to realize that the whole scheme of an idealized Universe was more than just a poetic exercise of the imagination. It was built upon a foundation of actual observations, and on logical, though somewhat unreal, conclusions that followed from those observations, probably very early in the history of the human race.

For example, the concept of a flat Earth must have come about because human vision is limited to the visible horizon, and early man was unable to notice any significant curvature. Then, the further idea that the Earth was square, with "Four Quarters," must have arisen when people came to recognize the Four Cardinal Directions: North, South, East, and West. The latter, in turn, probably arose quite naturally. Man's bisymmetrical body structure automatically leads him to think in terms of front and back, right and left, in a four-way outlook.²⁸ This could have been extended to Space after people noticed that the Sun consistently moves across the sky from East to West, when someone facing East—the direction of the Sunrise, and hence of auspicious promise—extended his arms to left and right, creating a new North-South line that crossed the East-West one at right angles.²⁹—Perhaps as a remote survival of this, Arabic and other languages have a single word to mean both "right" and "South," and another that means both "left" and "North."³⁰

The Asian concept of the sky as a circular ceiling, or an inverted bowl or dome, was doubtless inspired by the fact that when one stands on a high place in a relatively barren land, the sky appears to be closing down on all sides, like a round lid. The alternative idea, that the circular sky resembled a rotating wheel or a revolving umbrella, was probably suggested when men noticed that at night the "fixed stars" seemed to be circling around a point in the sky marked by the North Star, at the end of the "Little Dipper." It was this which led the Persian poets, down through the centuries, to refer to the sky as a wheel, in such expressions as *charkh-e āsmān*.

Some practical-minded ancients apparently thought that this wheel or spinning disk must be turning upon some

tangible pivot, so they logically inferred that there must be an axis for the Universe, something that could be supporting the sky, as well as serving as the axle on which the wheel could revolve.³¹ In time, people began to represent this in a concrete way. Although the idea of an actual World Axis extended all across Asia and over into Europe, the various nations and cultures held different views, as to its precise form, hence they differed in representing it. Therefore, this is one of the few distinct variables in a system that was otherwise consistent over a very wide area of the globe.

Some people viewed the Universal Axis as a mountain rising at the center of the Earth, on the summit of which the Sky rested. This could be some outstanding peak, like the Greeks' Olympus,³² Anatolia's Ararat, or the Old Persian Demavand, or else a purely imaginary one, like the Buddhists' Meru or the Chinese Taoists' K'un-lun Shan. Others thought of the Axis as being a giant tree, rooted in the Underworld, extending up through the center of the Earth and on through the middle of the Sky toward Heaven. This idea long persisted in the forest areas beyond the steppes in Inner Asia; though it may have started in the Near East.³³ There, the World-Tree had various specific



Fig. 8. Han dynasty "TLV" mirror, 1st century A.D. Yale Art Gallery.

Turkey (Catalogue of an Exhibition circulated by the Smithsonian Institution, in 1966-68), Washington, 1966, no. 233.

²⁸See Leopold de Saussure, "La cosmologie religieuse en Chine, dans l'Iran," etc., in *Proceedings of the 7th Congress for the History of Religions*, Paris, 1923, p. 84, note 1, which says (my translation), "In the ancient Orient—but not in China—notably in Iran, the expressions 'in front' (East), 'in back' (West), 'to the right' (South), 'to the left' (North), designated the cardinal points."

²⁹Recent experiments would seem to suggest that the human body may have some natural polarity by which the right hand would instinctively respond to South-polar magnetism, while the left one responds to North-pole magnetic influences. See Shafica Karagulla, *Breakthrough to Creativity*, Los Angeles, 1967, pp. 149-150.

³⁰The Arabic words *janūb* and *shamāl* were taken over into Persian with the same double meanings.

³¹The idea of the Cosmic Axis may have first arisen from an analogy with a house, the ceiling or roof of which had to have a supporting column or post, because the unsupported dome was probably a comparatively late invention, historically speaking. For some of the ideas about this axis, see Uno Holmberg, *Siberian Mythology* (Mythology of All Races, IV), Boston, 1927, p. 336 ff., discussing Asia in general. See also Mircea Eliade, "Centre du monde" (cited in note 11, above), especially pp. 57-58, in which he attacks the blindness of Western scholars who try to reduce these beliefs scientifically, thereby missing the whole point.

³²This should really be plural; because the Greeks used the term "Olympus" for several peaks, one of the most notable being the mountain now called Ulu Dag, which towers above the city of Bursa in Anatolia.

³³C.f. Holmberg, *ibid.*, p. 349.

names but it was generally considered as being the "Tree of Life."³⁴ Since early times in Mesopotamia, this was represented on pots, cylinder-seals, etc., as a date-palm or as a highly stylized flowering tree, flanked by two animals or two birds. Variations on this pattern have persisted in the Middle East into recent times, on rugs and other textiles. It must have been used very frequently on Mediaeval Turkish rugs, judging from the pictures of it as a repeated pattern on many examples of these reproduced in European paintings,³⁵ and a particularly notable, though highly stylized, version of it appears on the "Marby Rug" from 15th century Anatolia, now at the Swedish National Museum in Stockholm.³⁶

Still others thought of the World-Axis as being a pole, post, or column.³⁷ In this form it was symbolized by a mast protruding through the dome-shaped top of the Old Indian Buddhist stupas, which was intended to represent the sky arching over the flat Earth. This differed from the later spike projecting from the domes of mosques, as it seems to have been only the tip of a mast which transfixed the whole structure.³⁸ By a related convention, one of the marks of sovereignty for Persian Kings and Mughal Emperors, as well as the Emperor of China, was a long-handled umbrella, the canopy of which was figured with dragons, clouds, and other sky symbols—as in many Chinese rug patterns that were intended to represent a reflection of the Sky on Earth—while the staff that upheld it was considered as a miniature version of the Axis that was supposed to be sustaining the firmament.³⁹

More specifically relevant to our study is the fact that the Ghaznavids, a mediaeval Turkish dynasty, represented the World-Axis in their capital at Ghazni, in modern Afghanistan, by a tall column which in cross-section represented an eight-pointed star.⁴⁰ (Actually, they built two of

these there, at different times.) Probably the immediate influence was Iranian, since in earlier Persian diagrams the center of the world had been depicted as an eight-pointed star.⁴¹ However, a related form is shown on the Buddhist mandalas, also plans of the Universe, which generally had in the middle an eight-petaled lotus, framing the axial center as shown in Fig. 10, below.⁴² This device is significant, because the prominent central medallion on many Persian rugs—and those on many West Chinese and Mongolian rugs, as well—generally has at its very center an eight-pointed star or flower (see Fig. 15). This core-symbol, standing for the World-Axis at the center of Creation—even without all the associated symbols on the same rugs—should be enough to tell us that the whole field pattern, to which it provides the nucleus, was intended to represent the Universe, or at least the central part of it.

The World-Axis—whatever its form, visible or invisible—was also believed to serve as the main route for communication between Earth and Heaven, the immediate means of access being the Sky-Door at the center of the Sky. We have seen that the star-gazers early noticed that all the "fixed stars" seemed to be moving in great circles around the Polar one, and when they set these circles down on charts they discovered what seemed to be a clear space beside the Pole Star, at the apparent center of the turning Wheel of the Sky. This blank spot they thought must be an aperture, an opening into Heaven, so they called it the "Sky-Door."⁴³ Alternatively, they named it the "Sun-Gate," referring, not to the actual sun, but to a metaphysical one, in symbolic allusion to the blaze of splendor thought to be pouring out from the Celestial Glory behind it.⁴⁴—However, the Metaphysical Sun-Gate was later considered as a separate entity: the Entrance to the Throne of God, in the innermost part of Heaven, far within the Sky-Door proper. This was the belief in Safavid times.

For some reason—probably not unrelated to current interest in the Exploration of Space—the Sky-Door concept seems to be the most difficult part of this entire Universe-symbolism for a modern Occidental to try to visualize or comprehend. And yet, it once held a firm place in our Christian tradition,⁴⁵ and it is still figured in some of our churches and public buildings. In early Imperial Rome,

³⁴See George Lechler, "The Tree of Life in Indo-European and Islamic culture," *Ars Islamica*, Vol. 4, 1937, pp. 369-416. On p. 391, he emphasizes that the Sasanians took over the old Indo-European traditions of the earlier Persians, while Sasanian art traditions continued on in Islamic art; this essential continuity is too often ignored, especially by some Muslims who like to think that everything began anew with the founding of their faith.

³⁵Bode and Kühnel, fig. 6, shows a painting by the Italian Lippo Memmi, illustrating a rug with this theme. For another, by Sano di Pietro, see Erdmann, fig. 8. In these cases, the evidence from paintings seems quite adequate, as we are simply shown the use of a given motif; but Dr. Ettinghausen has wisely warned us against trying to base too much on rugs shown in the works of European artists, without due cautions. See "New Light on Early Animal Carpets," pp. 98-99.

³⁶The Marby Rug is illustrated in Erdmann, fig. 16.

³⁷See Holmberg, *Siberian Mythology*, p. 333 ff.

³⁸See *Symbolisme Cosmique, et Monuments Religieux* (Catalogue of an exhibition at the Musée Guimet), Paris, 1953, pl. 25, fig. 1, for a picture of the Great Stupa at Sanchi, on which the axis-mast once bore three umbrella-disks.

³⁹See Cammann, "Ancient Symbols in Modern Afghanistan," pl. 4, figs. 9 and 10, for royal umbrellas representing symbolically the Sky atop the World-Axis, and note that at the apex of the latter is a golden bird: the Sunbird.

⁴⁰See *Symbolisme Cosmique*, pl. 39, fig. 3, and text, p. 74.

⁴¹See *ibid.*, pl. 39, figs. 1 and 2, and text, pp. 76 and 77.

⁴²See *ibid.*, pl. 19.

⁴³Modern photography has confirmed the optical impression of a Sky-Door in a dome-shaped vault. See Gérard de Champeaux and Dom Sebastien Sterckx, *Introduction au Monde de Symboles*, (Paris?), 1966, pl. 2.

⁴⁴The old Chinese ideograph for writing the name of this Sky-Door, *ch'ang*, shows two suns glimpsed through a gate (here 2=many), apparently an attempt to convey the intensity of glory from the unimaginable splendor on the other side.

⁴⁵The cosmic symbolism in Christian structures originally tended to be restricted to oratories, martyria, and baptisteries, but gradually it came to be applied to parts of the church buildings as such. The West Tower of the Romanesque church at Moissac, in France, for example, was erected on cosmic principles and had Sky-Door symbolism in its ceilings; see *Symboles*, pls. 46 and 47, and text, p. 149.



Fig. 9. T'ang Dynasty marriage mirror, 8th century A.D. Courtesy of the Seattle Art Museum. Eugene Fuller Memorial Collection. 45.Ch6.3.

which knew the Sky-Door as the *Janua Coeli*, or "Gate of Heaven," it was physically represented in buildings like the Pantheon by a round hole or oculus at the apex of the dome, which was itself intended to represent the over-arching Sky. This convention continued on in the Romanesque and Gothic cathedrals of Western Europe, indicated in the latter by a circular hole in the ceiling at the crossing, where the transepts intersect with the nave.⁴⁶ The oculus was revived even more conspicuously in Italian Renaissance architecture, when the styles of the Classical Period returned to favor. Perhaps this opening at the top of the dome, shielded by the cupola above it, was not always consciously recognized as a symbol of "the Gate in the Sky;" but the imagined scenes of Heaven painted on the ceilings of many cupolas, to be glimpsed through the oculus, show that at least some artists remembered this symbolism and sought to reinforce it.⁴⁷

In Part I, we briefly noted that the border on most Oriental rugs was traditionally considered as a symbolic gate, one which could also serve as a barrier to exclude bad influences, and it would seem to have been this particular gate—the Sky-Door—that the rug designers or weavers

⁴⁶The Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris has a particularly splendid example of the Sky-Door concept in its ceiling: a circle of light stone upheld by four figures of angels.

⁴⁷When they built the Roman Catholic Cathedral of Sts. Peter and Paul in 19th century Philadelphia, an artist painted on the ceiling of the cupola, beyond the oculus, a figure of Christ on clouds, reigning in glory, so one looks upward through the hole in the dome to view the Divine figure "in Heaven" beyond the "Sky-Door."

originally had in mind. For Asian tradition taught that the latter was a barrier to set off the Spiritual World in Heaven from the material Earth, and that it would only admit those who were worthy and deserving to enter Paradise.⁴⁸ From the standpoint of Heaven, the Sky-Door was thus both excluding and protecting—the two functions that were believed to be implicit in the borders of the rugs, and were emphasized by the symbolic designs on them.

The view through the Sky-Door could be represented by Asian artists as either down or up: a God's-eye view down to Earth, or a human's glimpse into Heaven above. An idealized view of the Earth as it would be seen looking down through a hole in the Sky (the Sky-Door) was often portrayed on the backs of Old Chinese bronze mirrors. One particularly elaborate cosmic pattern on these has become known to Westerners as the "TLV pattern," because certain marks on it resemble those Roman letters (see Fig. 8). This pattern first appeared in a rudimentary form about the 2nd century B.C., but its meaning was not fully exposed until the first quarter of the 1st century A.D., when the pattern was further elaborated with the addition of figures that made its meaning quite explicit, and it continued on for several hundred years, with only minor changes.⁴⁹

This, and certain other Chinese mirror patterns of the same general period—1st through 7th centuries A.D.—having different designs but the same symbolic intent, had a raised outer rim to represent the Sky, as part of a Sky plus Earth diagram; and one looks down through this, as if through an aperture in the Sky (the Sky-Door), toward the Earth below. The latter's nine-fold plan was shown incompletely: partly because this was an idealized, symbolic view of the Earth, but also because it ran out under the flat rim that represented the Sky, so that the corners of the original basic square were hidden. The magical Center of the Earth, the Cosmic Axis, was prominently indicated by a tall hemisphere (the mirror's centered boss) intended to represent the Axis-Mountain. Around this was a central square, and in the specific "TLV" pattern the latter had a T projecting from the center of each side; while the V's, farther out, served to mark off the corner squares on the nine-fold plan of the Earth, thus emphasizing the essential cross-shape of its inner and most auspicious region, with the "Four

⁴⁸This was only an extension of the feeling about the symbolism of doors and gates in general. See J. A. MacCulloch, "Door," in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. IV, p. 846.

The idea of the Sky-Door as the place where souls were first admitted to Paradise might explain the welcoming angels or houris on some Safavid rug borders, as on the Boston and Vienna "hunting carpets." For the latter, see Erdmann, fig. 67; this shows angels offering food and drink to newly arrived souls also depicted with wings. On both of these the guard stripes carry out the usual functions of the border, showing that the borders are still of a different order from the Celestial realms depicted in the central field. The field patterns will be discussed in detail in the text in Part III, below.

⁴⁹See the first reference in note 14, above; and also S. Cammann, "Significant Patterns on Chinese Bronze Mirrors," *Archives of the Chinese Art Society of America*, Vol. 9, 1955, pp. 43 and 47, and fig. 3, p. 59. For later derivatives, see figs. 7 and 9, p. 60.

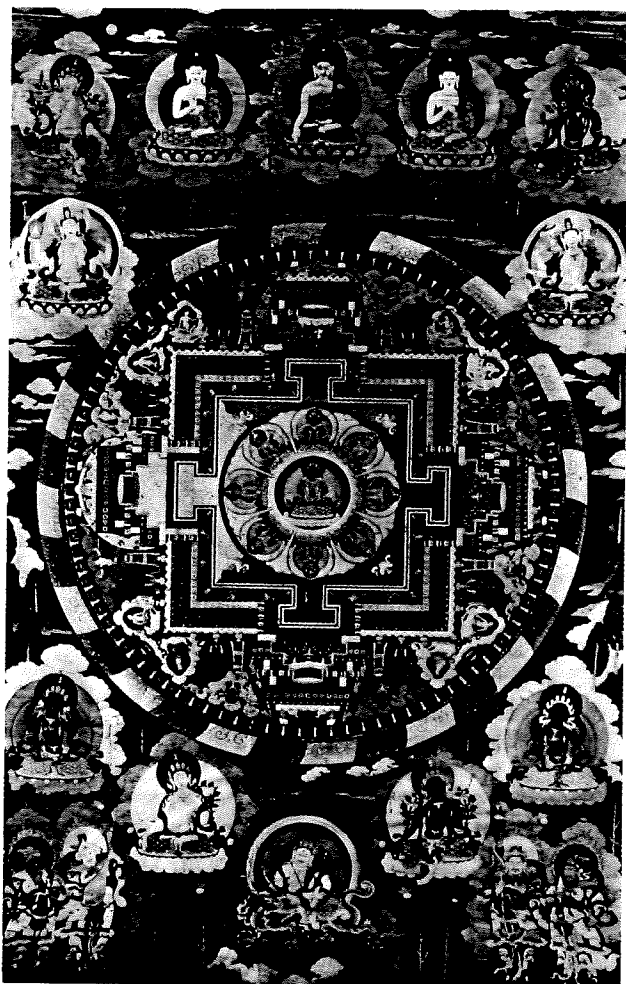


Fig. 10. A Lama Buddhist mandala. Courtesy of the Cleveland Art Museum. Gift of Howard Eel s

Quarters" radiating outward from the vital central square.⁵⁰

On the rim which marked the Sky—or, more exactly, the Sky-Door on these mirrors, a continuous band of scroll-work was apparently intended to represent clouds.⁵¹ In any case, this design of unbroken continuity, shooting out projections at regular intervals, foreshadows the vine motif that later replaced it on the rims of other types of Chinese

⁵⁰The central square around the mirror boss represented China (The "Middle Kingdom" or "Central Nation," *Chung Kuo*) at the center of the World. The four arms of the cross extending out into the four directions beyond its gates (indicated by the T's) were considered as positive or *yang*, while the four outer squares, shut off or excluded by the V's, were considered negative, *yin*. In short, the whole pattern followed the principle of the *Lo Shu* diagram, based upon the magic square of 3. See S. Cammann, "The Magic Square of Three in Chinese Philosophy and Religion," *History of Religions*, Vol. I, 1961, pp. 37-80. A survival of this idea could explain some nine-part rug medallions, such as those shown in Hawley, pl. M, no. 12 (facing p. 272), or Dilley, pl. LXII. The one in Hawley, pl. M, no. 9, has the swastikas in the wrong place for this symbolism, and it refers to something else. (See note 78, below, and the associated text.)

⁵¹Examine the rims of the mirrors in "Significant Patterns," figs. 3 and 5, on p. 59.

mirrors and ultimately on the rugs of China and other nations to the West. Later, too, actual cloud-forms were shown on the rims of several types of Chinese mirrors, further confirming the Sky-symbolism of the mirror rims.⁵² The "TLV" pattern and its derivatives had their peak of development during the Later Han and early T'ang dynasties, two periods when the Chinese Empire extended far into Central Asia, and when its products—including the bronze mirrors—reached even farther afield through trade.

Shortly before the T'ang Dynasty, in the latter part of the 6th century and the beginning of the 7th, and continuing on beyond that period, many Chinese cosmic mirrors portrayed around their rims a procession of the twelve animals of the Eastern Zodiac. (Pairs of these are shown in Fig. 9.⁵³) Since these animals were used in the Far East as symbols of the twelve two-hour divisions of the day, as symbols of the twelve months in the year, and as recurring symbols of the years in a 60-year cycle, the group as a whole presented a supreme symbol of Time itself. But the rims of the mirrors on which they paraded still represented the ring of the Sky or the Sky-Door. Thus, the dual meaning of the border patterns on the later Oriental rugs had a very long history in the Far East—but not only there.

Chinese bronze mirrors, and other objects on which this cosmic symbolism was expressed, being easily transported, travelled far across Asia, and so did the ideas behind them. The Turks, for example, retained the Eastern Zodiac in their gradual advance toward Western Asia, along with many other ancient Chinese cosmic concepts.⁵⁴

Although Chinese bronze mirrors from the Han and T'ang dynasties have been recovered at various sites in Central Asia and in Iran, one need not assume that the Persian rug patterns we are considering necessarily came directly from the patterns on these mirrors, even though they reflected many of the same ideas. Still less do I suggest that the Persian rug patterns had to have stemmed directly from the Lama Buddhist mandalas, which seem to have developed their characteristic framework from the earlier "TLV" mirrors.⁵⁵ (See Fig. 10.) The latter would seem most unlikely. Anything like the mandalas, so specifically related to an idolatrous "false religion" (in the Muslim view) would have been strictly taboo. What I am suggesting is: the Universe patterns on Persian rugs must have sprung from a common Asian world view, just as the basic design of a mosque was itself an expression of an earlier conception of the constitution of the Universe.

The partial relationship of the basic Persian rug patterns to the patterns on the Old Chinese mirrors and the basic

⁵²See *ibid.*, fig. 9, p. 60.

⁵³See also *ibid.*, figs. 8, p. 60, and 10 and 13, p. 61.

⁵⁴See E. Chavannes, "Le cycle turc des douze animaux," *T'oung Pao*, 2nd series, Vol. 7, 1906.

⁵⁵See S. Cammann, "Suggested Origin of the Tibetan Mandala Paintings," *The Art Quarterly*, Vol. 13, 1950, pp. 106-119.

plan of the mandalas is often obscured by the fact that the rugs had to be made as long rectangles, rather than circles, and the central medallion on them was often stretched lengthwise into an oval to conform better to the altered shape of the field, while additional ornaments might be extended outward from it to fill the open spaces in the long areas of the background. Then, as the original symbolism gradually became vaguer in people's minds, further distortions inevitably crept in. But still, the correspondences often seem quite remarkable. (See Fig. 11.)

Occasional patterns on the rugs of Persia and her neighbors seem to represent a God's-eye view down on Earth through the Sky-Door, as in the case of the so-called "Portuguese carpets" which we shall soon be discussing. (See Fig. 14.) Far more frequently, the view is upward, through the Sky-Door; a glimpse of the Heavens beyond that gate as reflected on "the mirror of the Earth" (a Sūfī concept). The most famous, and perhaps most representative of the Safavid patterns depicting this are those on the Ardebīl carpets and the so-called "Anhalt rug," which we will be discussing in Part III. But this basic theme was portrayed in many ways on countless lesser rugs.

In addition to the brilliant Sun-Gate at the center of Innermost Heaven, Asian tradition also conceived of four other openings called "Sun-gates," this time referring, not to the Metaphysical Sun, but to the actual one. These marked the imaginary portals through which our Sun was believed to enter and leave at the extreme limits of its course across the Sky: in the Northeast and the Northwest at the Summer Solstice, and in the Southeast and the South-

west at the Winter Solstice. Thus, in the Old Asian Sky-symbolism we have a quincunx formed by the Metaphysical Sun-Gate and the four lesser Sun-gates in the intermediate directions. The inner, royal city in Old Baghdad, designed to represent a reflection of Heaven upon the Earth, consisted of a circle of walls pierced by four gates in the Intermediate Directions, apparently in order to 'carry out this symbolism.⁵⁶ We shall see in Part III that this quincunx was a major theme on many Persian rugs that were also intended to represent a mirrored reflection of the Sky.

Referring to the Earth, as opposed to the Sky, West Asian symbolism was inclined to ignore the Four Gates at the cardinal points that were represented by the T's on the Old Chinese mirrors.⁵⁷ Instead, it postulated four lesser mountains, or pillars, at the ends of the Earth—or more generally at its corners—under the four Sun-gates.⁵⁸ They also believed that, like the latter, these four outer points could serve as lesser channels for communication with Divinity in Heaven beyond the Sky.

⁵⁶Wendell, "Baghdad," pp. 116 and 122.

⁵⁷In Ancient China this concept of the Four Gates was not confined to symbolic designs on mirror backs; this cosmic plan was also being used architecturally. Thus, in building cities and palaces, and shrines (especially a cosmic house called the Ming T'ang), the basic plan was four-square with a gate at the center of each side.

⁵⁸Ancient China seems to have had this idea, too, especially in the first two or three centuries A.D., when contact with Western Asia was bringing in foreign ideas. See, for example, the four lesser projections on the mirror in "Significant Patterns," fig. 5, p. 59. Also, China's four traditional sacred mountains (sometimes called "the Taoist set," as opposed to the Buddhist five) actually were located in the intermediate directions, although they are usually described in terms of the cardinal points.

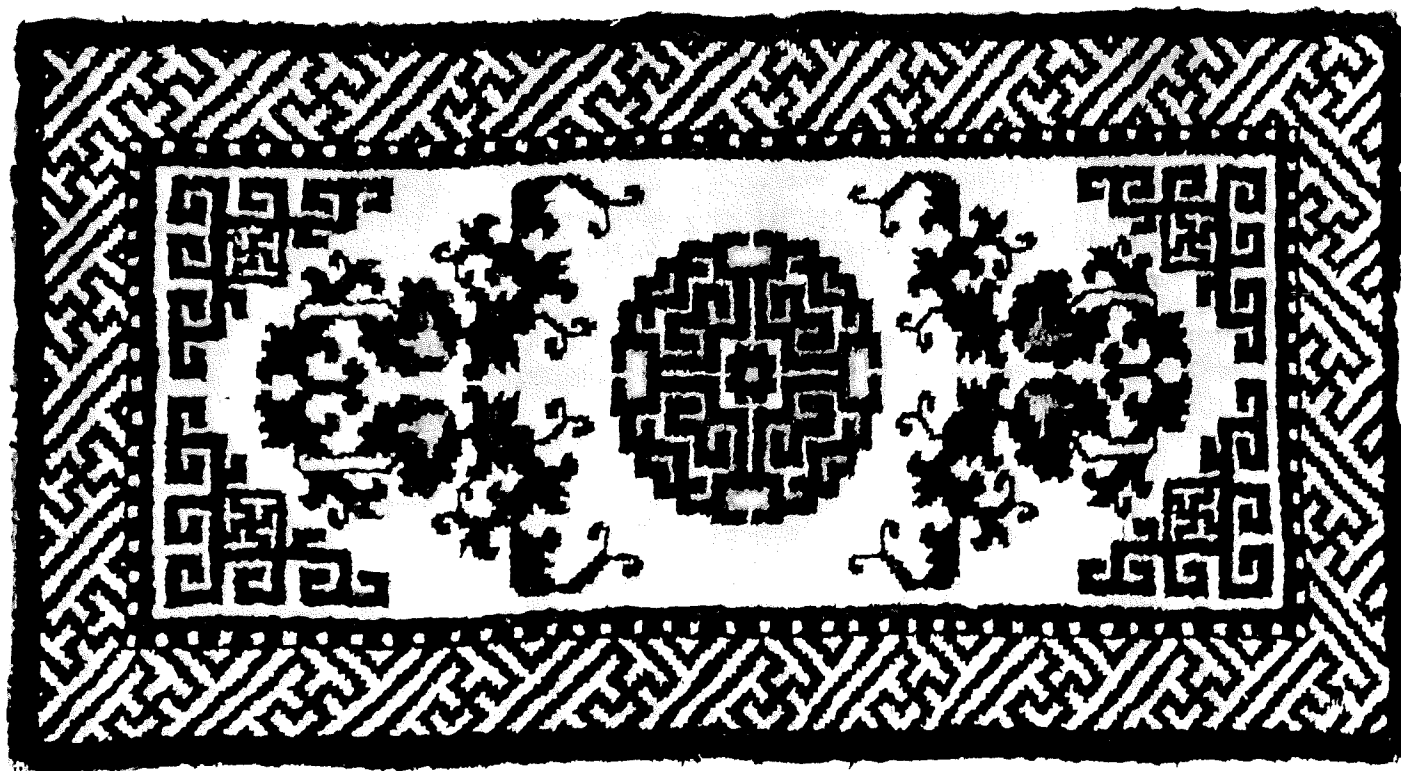


Fig. 11. Chinese over-saddle rug from Ninghsia. The Textile Museum. R51.1.12.



Fig. 12. Later Ch'ing Dragon robe. Courtesy of the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

This concept of the Earth as having a central Axis-Mountain and four additional mountain-supports—sometimes symbolized as one great mountain with a tall central peak and four lesser ones—furnished another quincunx plan, which had a tremendous influence on sacred buildings in Asia. For example, it can account for the five-part structure of temples in India and Burma, Cambodia and Java, which consisted basically of a tall central mass with four corner towers.⁵⁹ This can also explain some five-part mosque structures, and possibly some of the mosques which have a minaret at each of the four corners.—The plan of the Taj Mahal, which as we have seen was definitely designed as a "Universe in microcosm," incorporates both these features.⁶⁰

More significantly, from the point of view of our textile interests, this belief accounts for the four mountains rising from an encircling sea at the base of the later Chinese

dragon robes, the pattern of which always represented the Universe in miniature. (See Fig. 12.)⁶¹ (The central mountain was symbolized by the spine of the wearer.) This, in turn, explains the four mountains shown projecting from the sea at the sides and/or the corners of Chinese dragon rugs or small seat-mats. The pattern here is considered as a view down through the Sky with its sky-dragons, toward Earth with its surrounding Sea.⁶² Chinese Universe symbolism generally demands a combined picture of Land, Sea and Sky, but on these rugs the sky element is indicated by the presence of the dragons, so there is no Sky or Sky-Gate border, no separate border at all, simply the decorative

⁵⁹See S. Cammann, *China's Dragon Robes*, New York, 1952, pls. 5, 6, 9-12, etc., and text, pp. 81-91.

⁶⁰On these Chinese rugs, the place of the central axis itself is occupied by the middle dragon whose body obscures any other symbol of it. The background is usually yellow. In Western Asian symbolism, yellow usually denotes the golden realm of Heaven or Paradise. In China, however, blue was the usual color for the Sky or Heaven, and yellow referred to the Yellow Earth of China. (On the other hand, a very special shade of bright yellow was reserved for the Chinese Emperor and Empress, and this particular one might also refer to Heaven.) For more about Chinese color symbolism, see Part III, note 10.

⁵⁹See the Southeast Asian temples illustrated in *Symbolisme Cosmique*, pl. 27.

⁶⁰See Volwahsen, *op. cit.*, p. 103, for a good picture of the Taj Mahal; see also the plans on pp. 82 and 85.

edging provided by the conventionalized water. On both the dragon robes and dragon rugs, the deep sea below the waves is usually rendered by an odd convention of straight or wavy slanting stripes, called *li shui*, as shown at the bottom of the pillar rug in Fig. 13.⁶³ This same device also appears on the edging of rugs from Chinese Turkestan, with or without the upper waves or the mountains, and quite possibly it was placed there without recalling the meaning, as the rugs on which it appears seem to be late productions from a region of broken traditions.⁶⁴

The concept of a band of waters around the Earth leads us directly to the final basic element in the Old Asian idea of the Universe: the presence of a limiting boundary. Old Iranian cosmology envisioned a ring of mountains, later known as *Qāf*, but—like the Asian peoples in general—later Persians also thought of a continuous band of waters, outside or inside of this.⁶⁵ Ancient Chinese texts spoke of the “Four Seas” at the edges of the Earth, presumably located in the four corner squares of the nine-part plan of the Earth. Often this seems to have been just a poetic metaphor, referring to regions, rather than to actual waters,⁶⁶ but the mediaeval bronze mirror-backs clearly show that by that time, at least, they thought of seas at the four corners of the Earth. At the center of the mirror in Fig. 9, for example, we find waves in the four bays at the corners of the five-part mountain that symbolized the land portion of the Earth.⁶⁷ Eventually, though, the Chinese thought of a fully surrounding sea, as we have seen it shown on the bottom of the dragon robes and the edges of the rugs.

In most depictions of the Earth as seen from above on Near Eastern rugs, however, the border cuts off the outer portions, to the extent that it is impossible to see either the surrounding mountain peaks or the encircling Sea. But we can find a few exceptions on which the latter was at least partially shown: notably on the so-called “Portuguese carpets” and their immediate relatives. (See Fig. 14.)

In the first place, the patterns on these are obvious depictions of the Universe. They show a central land-mass, with glimpses of the Sea, as seen through a border-frame which must have represented the Sky or the Sky-Door.⁶⁸

⁶³The *li shui* convention is used at the bottom of the robes shown in *China's Dragon Robes*, pls. 9-14. It was also common on “pillar rugs,” as illustrated in Dilley, pls. LVIII and LVIX, upper left, and on throne-backs, *ibid.*, pls. LXIX, upper right.

⁶⁴See S. Reed, figs. 97 and 98, p. 103.

⁶⁵See Carra de Vaux, “*Bahr Muḥīt*,” in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 1927, Vol. II, pp. 583-585, and L. de Saussure, “Le Système cosmologique Sino-iranien,” *Journal Asiatique*, series 12, Vol. I, 1923, p. 284. See also Holmberg, *Siberian Mythology*, p. 310.

⁶⁶See Canmann, “The ‘TLV’ Pattern,” p. 61, right column.

⁶⁷See also Canmann, “Significant Patterns,” fig. 8, p. 60, where the mirror design shows small sea-monsters emerging from the corner squares of the nine-square plan.

⁶⁸A number of the “Portuguese carpets,” including most of the known surviving examples are pictured in C. G. Ellis, “The Portuguese Carpets of Gujerat,” in *Islamic Art in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New York, 1972, pp. 267-286. The carpet in his fig. 14—whether or not it was re-knotted and altered, as is claimed in the text on p. 271—seems to represent the seven-tiered Heaven. In any case, celestial symbolism is suggested by

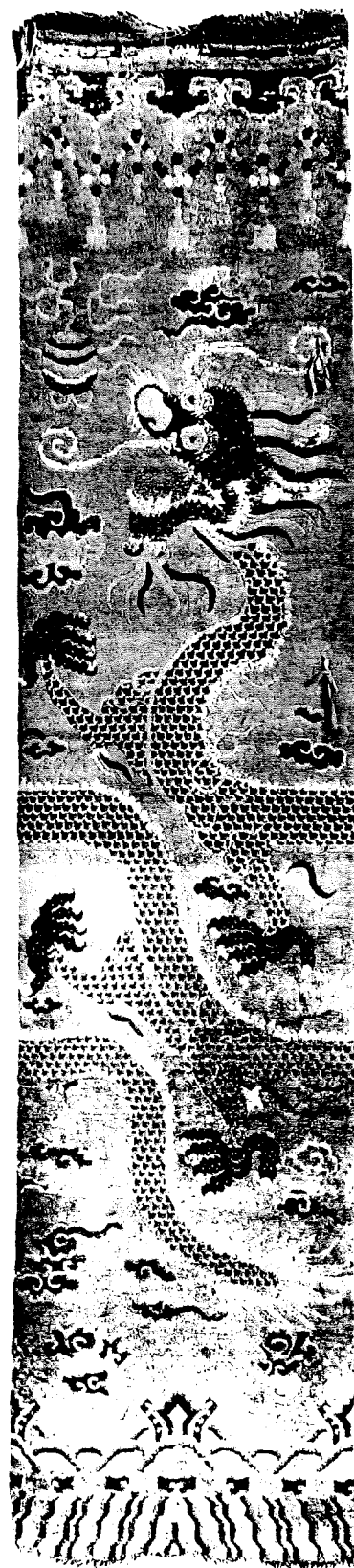


Fig. 13. Chinese pillar rug. Courtesy of the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

the eight medallions that show the lion and bull conflict (which is discussed below). If so, this pattern is an exception to the rest.

Although the border contains no specific symbols to link it directly to the Sky, the continuous, rhythmic design on its main stripe, with evenly-spaced motives, is typical of Sky and Sky-Door borders on other rugs where the symbolism is beyond question.⁶⁹ Furthermore, it seems obvious that we are looking down through a much higher frame which cuts off large sections of the pattern "below" it. In at least two directions, and sometimes on all four, the ends of the square or diamond-shaped land-mass are hidden under the border, so the water portions are confined to the corners of the field, and yet it seems rather certain that the designers were thinking in terms of a fully-surrounding Sea.

The water is labeled as such by a rippled surface, and by ships with sailors, fish and sea monsters—and, in most cases, by a merman as well—all of which serve to fill the spaces that would otherwise have seemed unnaturally empty in view of the complexity of the rest of the pattern. In fact, a similar sense of *horror vacui* would seem to account for the designers' filling open spaces on the land-mass with flowers and birds. Because some of the people aboard the ships were dressed in European style—even though not all were Europeans—some Western scholars decided these must have been woven in Goa in India, where Oriental and European influences met and blended during the 16th century under Portuguese rule. Thus, they became known as "Portuguese carpets," even though many other Western scholars still insisted that they must be Persian because they seemed to be woven in a Persian technique.

The attribution to Goa seems unlikely, however, because a close look at the ships reveals an unfamiliarity with sea-going craft,⁷⁰ and the figures of the sailors are hardly complimentary. They were obviously intended to represent "barbarians," as strange as the sea monsters and the mermen shown frequenting the remote waters at the ends of the Earth. Disregarding this, a recent article made another attempt to relate them again to India. Its author claimed that these carpets must have been woven in India, although the actual weavers were probably Persians, because the subject of the seascape in the corners he thought must have been the death of Sultan Bahadur of Gujerāt, who was murdered by a Portuguese sea-captain when he imprudently went unarmed to visit his ship at Diu in 1557.⁷¹

⁶⁹A more complete pattern, of which the border on these rugs seems just a truncated version, is shown on the Sky-portion of a Turkoman tent—above the cloud-collar points which signify the boundary between Earth and Heaven—in a 16th century Persian miniature reproduced by Grube, pl. 83, p. 145; and a variation of it is shown in the same place in another miniature, *ibid.*, pl. 80, p. 127. In short, we seem to have on these rugs a reverse of the usual symbolism, because their field pattern apparently represents the Earth and Sea, while the border symbolizes the Sky.

⁷⁰These are obviously not European ships, in spite of the remarks made in Ellis, *op. cit.*, p. 269 ff. They are typical of the rather fanciful boats shown in Persian and Mughal miniatures of the same general period (16th and early 17th centuries), which have a sharp prow terminating in the head of a bird or animal, often with a horsetail hanging beneath it. For an example, see the *Survey of Persian Art*, Vol. V, pl. 883. The horsetail, in highly stylized form appears on the Knole carpet, shown in Ellis, *ibid.*, figs. 11 and 12.

⁷¹This theory is presented in *ibid.*, pp. 283-286.

However, the little sea-pictures do not in any sense depict scenes of violence, and it was not characteristic of Muslim usage to represent an historical event on a carpet. As is indicated by the flow of the field pattern passing out under the border, tradition-minded Asians were not interested in any fixed moment of time. Isolated, topical or historical events did not concern them, and, in the old days, they certainly never pictured them on the rugs, the patterns of which symbolized the timeless, the eternal. Furthermore, a revenge subject is especially unthinkable. Who, in any nation, would care to be constantly reminded of an act of cruel treachery, especially one which reflected no credit on the victim?⁷²

The figure in the water, who was supposed by that writer to be the murdered Sultan, is not wearing the costume of a ruler; and secondly, a merman hailing a ship was a stock figure in many Persian water scenes, as Dr. Ettinghausen has previously demonstrated.⁷³ Any traditional Muslim who viewed these carpet patterns at the period when they were newly woven would simply have accepted this figure as a merman (*mardum-e ābi*, in Persian), another sea creature like the fish. Indeed, one surviving rug in this series shows only a single ship without the swimmer; while other textiles from about that time simply portray a seascape with ships, and no man in—or of—the sea.⁷⁴

What was the full meaning of this pattern, then? In the first place, it represented a traditional plan of the Universe: Land and Sea and Sky. However, the centrality of the pattern, with the quincunx of raised designs at the middle (perhaps intended as an idealized representation of the five peaks), together with the tiny eight-petaled flower at the very center, show that this was intended to represent the Center of the World. Such symbolism in rug patterns, in the layout of mosques, and on helmets, etc., was a direct expression of the belief that the Universal Axis, the hub of all Creation, was located directly under the Entrance into Heaven; and if one could somehow manage to situate oneself at its base, or in line with it, one could link one's destiny with Heaven, possess magic powers on Earth, and have positive assurance of life in Paradise after death.

Many Asians believed that small models of the Universe, or of its Center, could somehow concentrate the power descending through the Axis at a definite focal point. This

⁷²The Indian chronicles describe him as having been a cruel and worthless prince. They claim he was a notorious drunkard and suggest that he may have been recovering from a debauch when he stupidly went unarmed to visit a ruthless enemy, the treacherous Portuguese captain. At least one account says he was killed in a fort on shore, after which his body was thrown into the sea. If so, he could not have been depicted as being murdered by drowning; See Sir Edward Clive Bagley, "The Local Muhammedan Dynasties," in *A History of India As Told By Its Own Historians*, London, 1886, pp. 394-399.

⁷³See G. D. Guest and Richard Ettinghausen, "The Iconography of a Kashan Luster Plate," *Ars Orientalis*, Vol. 4, 1961, pp. 45-55, esp. p. 52.

⁷⁴See Ellis, *op. cit.*, fig. 10, for a carpet without the figure of the merman in the sea. The Textile Museum has a section of cloth figured with the boats and their sailors (T.M. no. 3.131), but again there is no trace of a human figure in the sea.



Fig. 14. A so-called "Portuguese carpet." Courtesy of the Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum.

they thought was possible because, regardless of how concretely the World-Axis might be depicted, it was not a material thing. As a spiritual link with the Eternal its top was fixed in Heaven, but the invisible shaft was flexible. In this view, any temple, mosque, or shrine, any royal palace or tomb of a saint, any cosmic mirror or any rug, if correctly designed or patterned to depict the Universal plan, could be considered as having its center at the base of the Axis, at the very center of Creation. Thus, anyone who sat at the center of a "Portuguese carpet" could believe that he was under Divine Protection, and in a direct line to receive benefits from Heaven.

This, then, was a good enough reason for using this particular pattern. Unfortunately that does not help us to determine where this class of carpets was woven, as this symbolism was so widespread. However, the presence of a black African aboard one ship, and a Malay crewmen in the rigging of another, on some of these, suggests that the designers might have been Mughal artists, familiar with these other races.⁷⁵

For some Asians, not merely the center of the Universe, but a depiction of the entire Universe, as a harmonious whole, could provide creative energy and renewal, and even bestow magic powers. This was especially true where a person was already considered as representing the Axis: for example a Chinese, Mongol, or Tibetan, wearing a

⁷⁵See Ellis, *op. cit.*, figs. 2, 3, 5, 6 and 7, for the Malay, and figs. 2, 3 and 12, for the black sailor aboard one of the ships.

cosmic dragon robe. Thus, on the West China and Mongolian rugs (the latter were made for the Mongols by Chinese, not by the Mongols themselves), we find two kinds of representations of the Universe. The first type, mostly from Ninghsia, shows a highly conventionalized, horizontal spread depicting the Universe, with its center containing a still recognizable survival of the central portion of the cosmic pattern on the Han dynasty "TLV" mirrors. (See Fig. 11.) The second type, a specialty of the Pao-t'ou District in Suiyüan, shows, in vertical projection, more naturalistic patterns featuring symbolic birds—such as the auspicious phoenix, or the crane of Longevity—or a symbolic stag, posed near a tree (which is usually the pine of Longevity) on the Land, with Water and Sky.⁷⁶ On either type, the border generally has an endless pattern with regular repeats to identify its dual role as a representation of the Sky-Door and a symbol of on-going Time. However, some late examples, made after the old tradition was dead, lack any border.

The Safavid Persian "garden rugs" and "animal carpets" also provide examples of more generalized scenes: both in horizontal spreads, as though seen looking down directly from above, and in vertical projections. But the garden rugs were usually illustrations of Paradise, or reflections of it,

⁷⁶See P. Liebetrau, *Oriental Rugs in Colour*, pl. 63 for an example of a 20th century Pao-t'ou rug pattern. (The caption to this plate is misinforming: the two birds are male and female Chinese phoenixes, not "cocks," and the rug is a late one, probably from the 1930's.)

and the animal carpets generally represented the Garden of Eden, also located beyond the Sky-Door; so we shall wait to discuss both these types in Part III, along with the whole class of Paradise patterns. On these latter the symbolism is frequently extremely complex, and in order to explore it with fuller understanding we must turn aside once more to investigate still another basic group of symbols, those referring to the Sun.

Symbols of the Sun, and the Sunbird

The Sun as a physical feature made a tremendous impression on primitive man. In fact, it continues to awe us today; even though we know a lot more about it from scientific observations, we still recognize that all life here on Earth depends on it. Early man also revered and respected the Moon, because it brightened the darkness of night, and because by its apparent growing and diminishing, while waxing and waning, it seemed to have a life of its own; but also because it provided a convenient way for measuring time. In fact, it would seem that an early Moon cult (probably matriarchal) was later displaced by a Sun cult (unquestionably patriarchal).

As an expression of this primordial conflict between the adherents of these opposing beliefs, the solar lion attacking and slaying a horned lunar animal became a favorite motif in Near Eastern Art for at least three millenia, and it often reappears on the Safavid carpets. The male lion with his round face set off by a bushy golden mane—especially when shown in front view—was a natural symbol for the radiant Sun, while the upcurving horns of an ox naturally suggested the form of the crescent Moon. (The Moon as a symbol was usually represented as a crescent, because a disk would have confused it with the solar disk.—In the Far East it was sometimes pictured in the round, but only if the circle was filled with some identifying element such as a hare or a toad, both of which were associated with the Moon.)

The lion as a sun-symbol held connotations of light, as well as power reinforced by wisdom. The lunar bull, in contrast, conveyed the idea of brute physical strength, unreasoningly applied, and of darkness, through its black color or its association with the night-shining Moon. Thus, in conflict, they represented a timeless, irreconcilable struggle: Light against Darkness, Wisdom against Ignorance, agility against sheer bulk, even Good against Evil. This opposition was probably envisioned long before the development of Astronomy and Astrology—which eventually adopted these two animals as symbolic figures for constellations—and the old idea still lingered on into recent times, because it symbolically expresses the fundamental fact of a dichotomy in Nature, in the human condition, and within each individual.⁷⁷

⁷⁷In Willy Hartner's portion of the article by him and Richard Ettinghausen, "The Conquering Lion, the Life-Cycle of a Symbol," *Oriens*, Vol. 17, 1964, pp. 161-171, only one aspect of this centuries-old symbol, the astrological phase, was described, as though that dealt with the complete life-cycle of this ancient, multivalent theme of cosmic conflict.

Sun and Moon were also symbolized by lamps, and the demotion of the Moon, together with the immense difference in the degrees of illumination, led to the latter's being called "the lesser light." We find this idea very literally portrayed in the relative size of the two symbolic lamps on the Ardebil rugs—as shown in Fig. 19.

The early peoples of Asia, as we have already mentioned, conceived of the Sun as a disk, and they often represented it as such: either plain, or one provided with human features—a true "Sun face." Frequently, too, they placed a cross within the disk to indicate the "four stations of the Sun: in the East at dawn, overhead at midday, in the West at sunset, and "underneath" at night. (This four-spoked "sun-wheel," with all its connotations of brilliant light and splendor, was taken over into Christian symbolism as the special halo used to distinguish the Three Persons of the Trinity.)

Sometimes people used the cross without the circular rim, adding a projecting "foot" to each end in order to impart a sense of rotation, and thus they created the swastika, which in its primary meaning was simply a rotating solar-cross.⁷⁸ However, an equally early and very persistent symbol of the Sun was a golden bird: an eagle, falcon, goose, or rooster—the last of which has survived on Occidental weathervanes, once cosmic symbols in themselves.⁷⁹ And, as the idea of the Sun's four stations continued on, they sometimes portrayed four birds at the ends of a cross which had an open center, or simply four birds radiating from a common point without any connecting cross.⁸⁰ They also might use four swastikas, or even four Sun-faces, to indicate the four stations, as symbols of passing Time. Both of these latter conventions can be found on rugs. The swastikas, for instance, are shown in Fig. 15.⁸¹

Furthermore, Hartner's reference to the lion's joint-mark (on his shoulder) as a "star symbol," shows a basic lack of understanding of symbolism at the folk level, where it is most vital. Carl Schuster's article, "Joint Marks," in *Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen, Mededeling No. 94*, Amsterdam, 1951, handles this topic in several of its aspects, and stars played no part in it. See also Part III, note 11, below, for another side of the lion vs. bull symbolism.

⁷⁸The figure of the swastika, by its very simplicity, has acquired numerous meanings among various peoples throughout history, and even more "explanations" in modern times. One of the best basic studies of it is presented in Count Goblet d'Alviella's *Migration des Symboles*, Paris, 1891, reissued in an English translation as *The Migration of Symbols*, New York, 1956. The second chapter is devoted entirely to the swastika and the related triskelion, stressing their solar connotations.

⁷⁹For some aspects of Asian bird symbolism, see S. Cammann, "Ancient Symbols in Modern Afghanistan." On the traditional European weathervane the upright pole topped by the cock (as a form of Sunbird) stood for the World Axis, while the four quarters of the Earth were indicated by the horizontal cross which had at the ends of its arms the initials N, E, W, S.

⁸⁰Carl Schuster wrote an important article on this motif, concerning himself with some of its more far-flung examples: "An Ancient Chinese Mirror Design Reflected in Modern Melanesian Art," *Far Eastern Quarterly*, Vol. 11, 1951, pp. 52-65. Probably the four angels supporting the ring around the hole in the center of the ceiling at the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris (mentioned in note 46, above) represent an ultimate extension of this motive.

⁸¹For the four suns, see the *Survey of Persian Art*, Vol. VII, pl. 1099. This illustrates an embroidered Persian textile from the 16th century, contem-

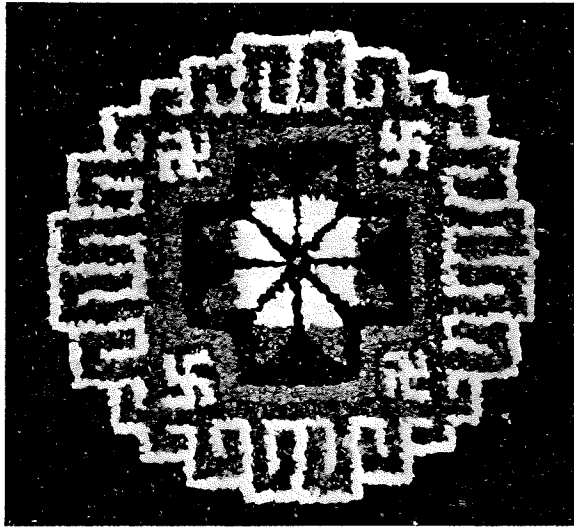


Fig. 15. Central medallion of a West China rug, from the writer's collection.

As we have already seen, in addition to our regular Sun, Asian philosophy and religion also conceived of another, metaphysical Sun, at the top of the World Axis, which gave its name to the Sun-Gate at the center of Heaven. Because of the interchangeability of symbols and symbolic ideas, the symbols of the actual Sun came to be transferred to this metaphysical one.

For example, an unknown Sūfī poet, writing "An Ode to a Garden Carpet" sometime around 1500, used the figure of the solar lion to refer to the Metaphysical Sun,⁸² as follows:

porary with some of the Safavid rugs we are about to consider, showing a scene of Paradise as glimpsed through an arched gate. The main border contains angels, and in the corners of the inner borders are the four suns. Four suns are also depicted on the newly acquired hunting carpet in Boston Museum of Fine Arts, in the corners of its main border band. See *BMB*, 69, figs. 3-5.

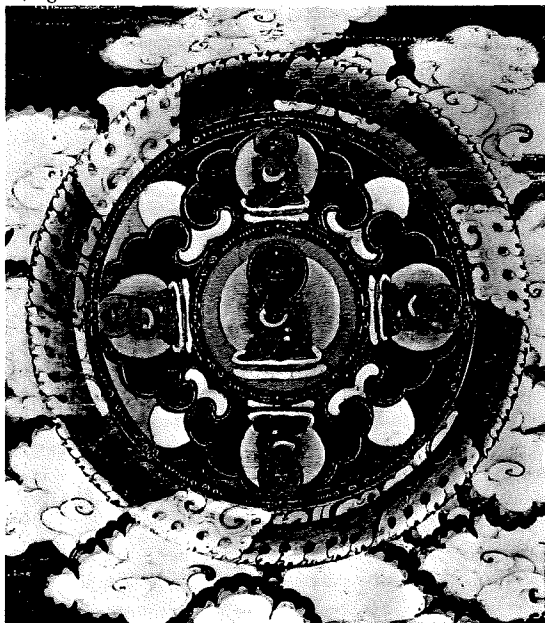


Fig. 17. A Lama Buddhist "cloud collar" mandala. Courtesy of the Royal Ontario Museum of Archaeology, Toronto.

The central medallion is the all-powerful Sun,
A golden lion, the skies commanding,
Its life-giving power flows down along the cosmic axis,
And all creation stirs in vibrant glow.

Pictorially, the Metaphysical Sun was quite generally represented as a giant bird atop the World Axis.⁸³ As such, it was shown in many regions of Asia in the form of a large bird set up on a pole or stylized tree, or perched above a literal gate.⁸⁴ And, as the Metaphysical Sun was considered as the outward manifestation of Heaven's Light, opposed to the sinister darkness of the Underworld below, the Sun-bird that represented it was often depicted attacking one or two snakes or lizards, or fish, or even hares—which, in turn, symbolized the creatures of darkness, dwelling beneath the surface of the land or sea.⁸⁵

As a further development, in Northern and Central Asia, and also in the Near East, the Metaphysical Sun came to be

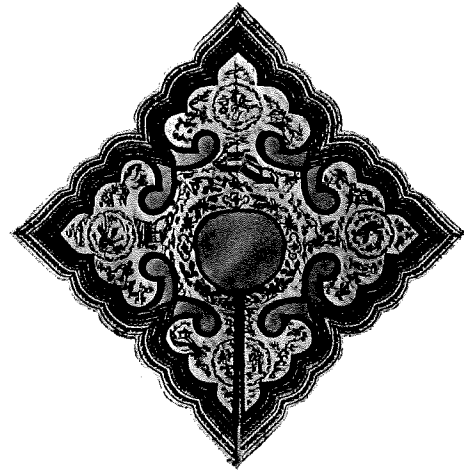


Fig. 16. A Chinese "cloud collar," 19th century. Courtesy of the Johns Hopkins University Museum.

⁸²This poem is given in full in the *Survey of Persian Art*, Vol. 14, 1967, pp. 3185-86. A further quotation from it will be found in Part III, below. — The entire poem is well worth reading, as it brings in so many of the symbolic ideas that we have been reviewing here. Unfortunately, the name of its translator is not given. He deserves great credit for understanding, and rendering so well, the particular Sūfī spirit.

⁸³A very striking example of this concept was wrought into the pattern on a metal mirror made for a Turkish (Ortoqid) Prince in Iraq, in the 13th century A.D. The circular pattern as a whole was intended to symbolize the sky. An outer band contains the twelve symbols of the Western Zodiac, while an inner one contains symbolic figures of the Seven Planets (the Sun and the Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, and Saturn), and at the very center was a great bird—The Sunbird. But, since the physical Sun was already symbolized, this must have stood for the Metaphysical Sun. As tradition required, its body was pierced with a hole, which at the same time had a functional use, since it could give passage for a cord with which to hold or fasten the mirror. This is illustrated in Grube, *The World of Islam*, fig. 49, p. 97. In the outer band, notice the very ingenious way in which the Zodiac figures are connected by continuous lines, to give a sense of flowing continuity of the type that we find on rug borders.

⁸⁴See Holmberg, *Siberian Mythology*, p. 333, and fig. 13, p. 334. I have personally seen figures of symbolic birds atop posts in various parts of Thailand, on a field-trip in 1951; and in 1938 I noted an eagle atop a stylized gate, carved in relief on a Parthian altar at Taxila (now in Pakistan). There is still much of this kind to be seen around the World if one keeps alert.

⁸⁵The ceilings of synagogues in Poland were usually domed—as far as

symbolized as a huge eagle, usually having two heads, facing to right and left. Another distinctive mark of identification was a hole through its body to signify the Sun-Gate through which the Divine Light streams outward, and through which—in the other direction—the human soul must pass inward on its final journey to the Divine Source from which it sprang: the ultimate Return to Allah, so frequently referred to in the Koran. In addition, the developed form of the Sunbird usually had an extra pair of eyes on the outer joints of its wings, and it was generally shown clutching its prey, in the form of fish, snakes, or even confronting dragons.⁸⁶

This elaborated, yet quite naturalistic, form of the Sunbird persisted down through the centuries. Its most typical descendant was the European heraldic eagle—either single—or double-headed—with the hole in its chest covered by a shield, and its claws grasping scrolls, lighting bolts, arrows, etc., in place of the snakes. Examples may be seen in the coats-of-arms of Imperial Russia and Austria, and, secondarily, those of Old Germany and the United States.⁸⁷

Especially in the folk arts of European Russia and the Caucasus, the national, heraldic form was sometimes used in place of the ancient one, still retaining its older meanings. But in those regions, and elsewhere, the popular folk tradition commonly altered the figure of the Sunbird by progressive stylization, until it became virtually impossible to recognize it without some knowledge of the intervening forms in this process of development—or degeneration.⁸⁸

Carl Schuster discovered that this process can explain a vast amount of the symbolism on the Caucasian rugs, particularly on those from the Kazakh area.⁸⁹ Some of the wood construction would permit this—and painted to show cosmic symbolism. A 17th century example at Chodorow, painted about 1642, had at the center of the vault a circular device containing a rather naturalistic double-headed eagle, gripping a rabbit in the talons of each foot, while around it were twelve disks carrying the signs of the Zodiac. See Maria and Kazimierz Piechotka, *Wooden Synagogues*, Warsaw, 1959, fig. 9.

⁸⁶Dragons were considered benevolent, life-giving creatures in China; but, as we shall see in Part III, they were malevolent in the Near East. Thus, while both areas used them as symbols, the meanings were diametrically opposite.

⁸⁷The German—actually Prussian—eagle and the American one, were both adopted at a very late stage in the history of this motif: so the second head was lost, along with most of the symbolism; only the ideas of strength and protection seem to have survived.

⁸⁸See Schuster, "Some Comparative Considerations," (full ref. in Part I, note 116), pp. 68-81.

⁸⁹On the Caucasian rugs, in particular, the double-headed eagle-Sunbird has survived in many many variations. Luckily, we have an abundance of transitional examples to show the development from one type to another. For one of the more obvious survivals, see D. T. Rice, *Islamic Art*, fig. 249, p. 257; but this rug is shown upside down, so it is necessary to reverse the page to study the details properly. Note that every second motif in the field pattern shows the two heads—both facing in—and the twin fish hanging below. Tschebull's *Kazak* shows examples of the most highly stylized types on nearly every page. Among the most interesting are those shown in plates 26 and 30, each of which shows three examples. Those in pl. 26 reflect the tendency to place Sunbird within Sunbird; and these three, plus two of those in pl. 30, show the common convention of a "checkerboard body" with the individual squares done in various bright colors. This convention was also used on the much more naturalistic Sunbirds on the Anhalt Carpet, to be discussed below. See Part III, note 18.

stages in this process of "devolution" have already been described in Part I, above; but perhaps we would find that easier to understand if we first review some of the basic steps in that development.

The body of the traditional Sunbird gradually became more and more stylized, until in advanced forms it was simply an open diamond or a ring, to emphasize the Sun-Gate aperture. Meanwhile, the two heads shown in profile combined, or coalesced, to form one head shown sideways, with a single large eye at the center and the two beaks arching outward to right and left. In more extreme examples, we find simply a diamond or circular frame with the doubled head at the top, and a smaller version of the same—still with its "eye"—at the bottom to represent the tail, while the wings were reduced to slender projections at each side, usually thickened at the base to leave room for the "wing-eyes."⁹⁰ (This motif we find on many of the Anatolian rugs, particularly on those which the Turks exported to the Balkans, known to collectors as "Transylvanian."⁹¹ (See Fig. 5.) Since each abbreviated wing with its eye resembled another head, in the course of time these secondary heads, which Dr. Schuster called "wing-heads," were often taken to be the main heads, and the original one at the top dwindled to a mere vestige, sometimes even dropping out altogether.

By another curious process of disintegration, this already stylized, abbreviated Sunbird was often sliced in half horizontally, and the upper part turned down upon itself, so that it was reduplicated below. This produced an odd-looking figure with a double set of wings or wing-heads, and only vestigial heads at top and bottom. Dr. Schuster has pointed out that this is a characteristic symbol on Qashqai rugs from the Shiraz District of Iran.⁹²

By a contrary process, involving increasing complexity, other heads or wing-heads might be added to the rim of the open-centered body, often being abbreviated to what rug-enthusiasts call "latch-hooks."⁹³ And, all the while that the Sunbird itself was undergoing these various transformations, its prey, too, was being stylized and altered in the direction of ever-greater simplification. Thus, the snakes, lizards, and dragons became reduced to mere S-curves, and at least some of the *boteh* must be vestiges of fish.⁹⁴

⁹⁰See Carl Schuster, "Relations of a Chinese Embroidery Design: Eastern Europe and Western Asia," etc., in *Early Chinese Art and its Possible Influence in the Pacific Basin*, edited by Noel Barnard and Douglas Fraser, Vol. 2, New York, 1972, pp. 243-290.

⁹¹See Part I, note 76, for references.

⁹²See Schuster, "Relations," pp. 277-283. For actual Qashqai rugs from the Shiraz District, bearing these symbols, see Liebetrau, *Oriental Rugs in Colour*, pls. 16, 18, and 46a. A series of magnificent examples are spread on the floor of the library at the British Institute for Persian Studies, in Teheran.

⁹³See Tschebull, *Kazak*, pls. 1, 9, 11, 14, 20, 23, 25, 26, 29, 30, 32, 37, for examples of this.

⁹⁴On the rug shown in *ibid.*, pl. 20, a thoroughly stylized Sunbird at the top of the "niche" has two stylized dragons on each side—four in all—identified mainly by their heads; while the still more stylized Sunbird at the bottom of the niche has merely four S's. *Ibid.*, pl. 22, shows in the red reserve at the bottom, the remnant of a double-ended Sunbird flanked by two (or four?) dragons in green with white horns; and the same device is

Often the Sun-Gate at the center of Heaven was symbolized by four "trefoils" projecting from a central ring.⁹⁵ Originally this may, or may not, have stood for four sun-birds around the open Gate; but ultimately it was taken to be the Sunbird, with double heads at top and bottom, and two more at the sides, in place of the wings. In China this symbol was known as the "cloud-collar," *yün-chien*,⁹⁶ and in the absence of any more effective term, we might as well continue to use this one. (See Fig. 16.)

The first appearance of this device, known to me, occurred in Han Dynasty China, where it was commonly shown as a frame surrounding the Axis-boss at the center of the "TLV" mirrors⁹⁷ (see Fig. 8), and also to mark the axial center of lids on little cosmic-boxes, etc. Still later, it sometimes substituted for the eight-petaled lotus as a frame for the vital center on Buddhist mandalas, the basic plan of which seems to have descended from the old "TLV" patterns.⁹⁸ (See Fig. 17.) Whether the Chinese or the Tibetans recognized the bird symbolism here cannot yet be proved; but wherever they used the cloud-collar—with four or eight points—they considered this as marking the Universal Axis, whether it framed the center of an idealized plan of the Earth, or surrounded the Sky-Door overhead.

The first specific mention of this symbol by the name "cloud-collar" appears in a mediaeval Chinese history, describing a ceremonial robe worn by a Khitan-Tatar Emperor. This robe, it says, had a "cloud-collar" with the Sun and the Moon—presumably on the projections that extended out on the right and left shoulders.⁹⁹ Since the robe as a whole was a symbol of the Universe—as were nearly all later Chinese imperial robes¹⁰⁰—the cloud-collar on it would have been considered at the top of the Sky, hence framing the Sky-Door.

The Khitans were later driven westward into Central Asia (to become the Qāra-Khitai people) by another Tatar group, who in turn succumbed to the Mongols. Then, the idea of a symbolic cloud-collar on robes was taken over by the Mongols, and Persian miniatures show us that they carried the custom to Iran in the course of their 13th century invasions.¹⁰¹—The custom even reached as far as

the Balkans: several portraits of princes who ruled Serbia before the Turkish conquest show them wearing it.¹⁰²

The Mongols of the 13th and 14th centuries, and later, also placed a cloud-collar device, with four or eight projections, atop the dome-shaped roof of their more elaborate tents, and this custom is also recorded in the later Persian miniatures of Timurid and Safavid times.¹⁰³ Since the Mongol tents (yurts) were also considered to be representing the Universe, their domed roof stood for the Sky, and the smoke-hole at the top, framed within the cloud-collar was considered as the Entrance to Heaven.¹⁰⁴

When the Ch'ien-lung Emperor of Ch'ing Dynasty China received foreign envoys and ambassadors from Outer Mongolia and Turkestan in the Summer Palace at Jehol, Inner Mongolia, in the 18th century, he met them in a dome-shaped ceremonial tent with a cloud-collar around the hole at the top, under which he sat on a square throne with steps leading down in the four directions (to symbolize the World-Mountain).¹⁰⁵ This was a three-dimensional rendering of the Universe, preserving much of the same symbolism that had been presented more flatly on the "TLV" mirrors seventeen hundred years before. (See Fig. 18.)

Typical "cloud-collar projections" are often found at the top of Mongol and Tibetan "pillar rugs" (again, woven by Chinese), which were fastened around the columns in Lama temples, the column itself being a symbol of the World-Axis.¹⁰⁶ These rugs also represented the Universe. At their base was a stylized picture of a rock rising from waves to represent Land and the encircling Sea, while above these, the rest of the pattern showed cloud-filled Sky, extending up to the cloud-collar at the top, representing the Sky-Door at the Entrance to Heaven.—Note that when the pattern on these includes a Sky-dragon, the animal appears to be cut up, until the rug is fastened around a column, when the various parts match up to form a single beast which coils around the whole. (See Fig. 13.)

In the domes of Persian mosques, and some Turkish ones, the elaborate medallion which surrounds the small, empty Sun-Gate at the center of the ceiling, usually has an outward-facing ring of cloud-collar points, intermeshing with another set of points, of the same shape but in a different color.¹⁰⁷ This reciprocal design, already many centuries old, had been primarily a symbol to mark the Sky-Door; but Sūfī mystics could rationalize the reciprocity and read the outgoing points as a symbol of Divine energy moving outward from the Sun-Gate, to meet the inward-turning ones which signified the responsive action of human souls

used eight times on the rug in pl. 28.

⁹⁵For a very early example of this, see Carl Schuster, "An Ancient Chinese Mirror Design," figs. 4 and 8, pp. 51 and 52, and text, pp. 61-63.

⁹⁶See S. Cammann, "The Symbolism of the Cloud Collar Motif," *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 23, March, 1951, pp. 1-9. Figs. 1 and 2, p. 10, show its actual use on collars from Chinese women's coats.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, pl. 3, p. 11, shows its use on a 'TLV' mirror.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, figs. 5 and 6, pl. 11.

⁹⁹See *ibid.*, text, p. 5, and note 22.

¹⁰⁰If the whole robe did not have a Universe pattern (for which see refs. in note 61, above) it had separate Universe symbols, often grouped in medallions, as shown in *China's Dragon Robes*, pls. 12a, and 13a and b.

¹⁰¹Numerous Persian cloud collars are depicted in the miniature paintings shown in the *Survey of Persian Art*, Vol. V, notably in pls. 850, 870, 871, 877, 878, 890, etc. See also Sarre and Martin, *Meisterwerke muhammedanischer Kunst*, Munich, 1912, and Marteau and Vever, *Miniatures Persanes*, Paris, 1913. For an actual example of an embroidered Persian cloud collar, apparently removed from a robe, see Sarre and Martin, Vol. III, p. 206, or the *Survey of Persian Art*, Vol. VI, p. 1017.

¹⁰²See Gabriel Millet, *L'Ancien Art Serbe: Les Eglises*, Paris, 1919, figs. 12 and 13 on p. 27; and F. Dvornik, "The Diffusion of Greek Culture, VI," in the *Geographical Magazine*, Vol. 19, no. 7, Nov. 1946, p. 300.

¹⁰³See the *Survey of Persian Art*, Vol. V, pls. 888b, 893, and 908a.

¹⁰⁴See Cammann, "Mongol Dwellings," pp. 20-22.

¹⁰⁵This ceremonial tent was illustrated in an engraving made by E. N. Cochin from an original drawing done in 1760. This is reproduced in fig. 18, above.

¹⁰⁶See Dilley, pl. LVIII (unfortunately, rather indistinct), and pl. LIX, top left.

¹⁰⁷See refs. to decorated domes in notes 23 and 24, above.

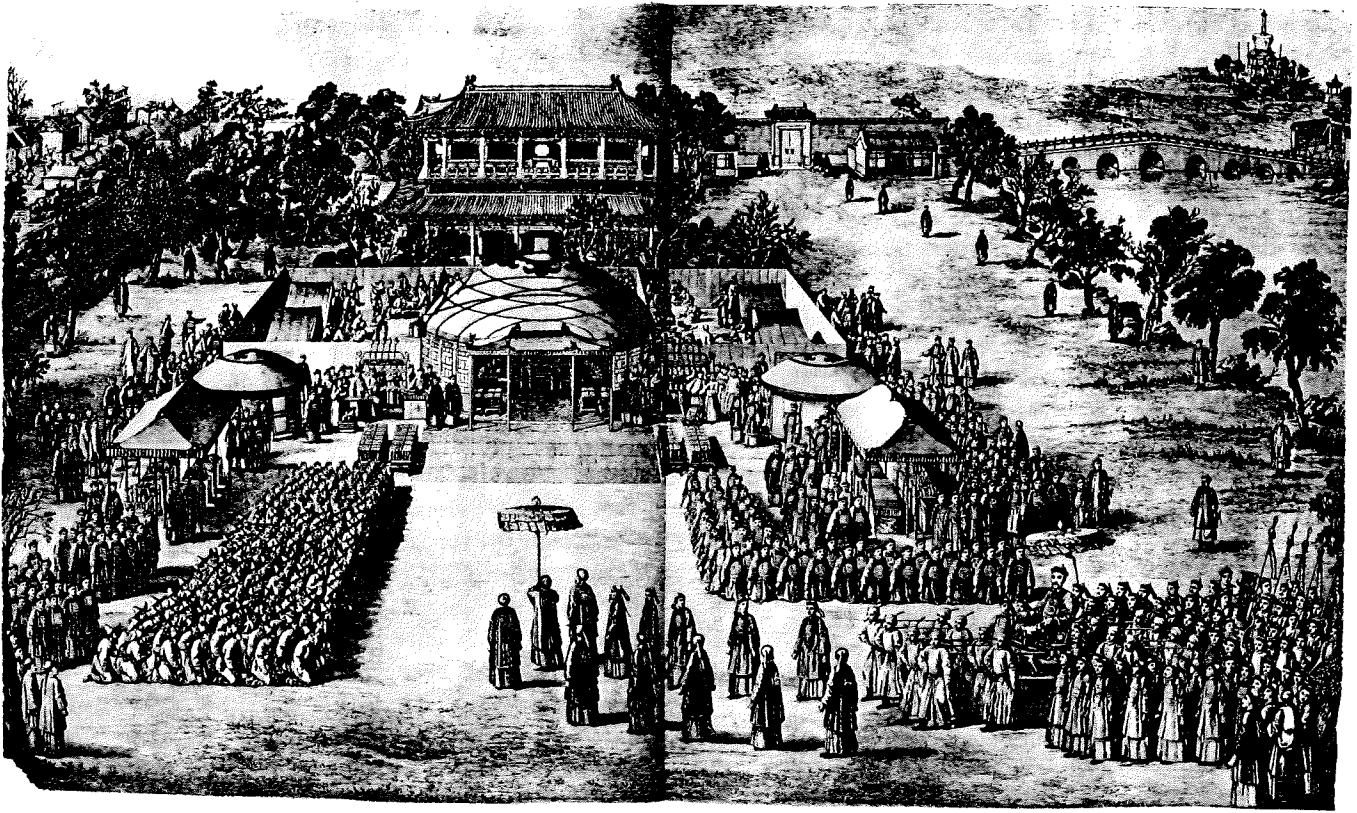


Fig. 18. The tent of the Ch'ien-lung Emperor, at Jehol, Inner Mongolia, in the 18th century, from a French engraving.

returning towards Heaven, from which they originally had come.¹⁰⁸

Although the analagous medallion at the center of the Persian carpets frequently retained the idea of the four-part cloud-collar, we note that on the domes of mosques and elsewhere, artists tended to expand the device into a circular or oval frame edged with a continuous array of the trefoil-points: in multiples of four—with eight, twelve, sixteen or more projections. This variation also appears on some rugs, notably on the pair from Ardebil.

Meanwhile, these trefoil-points began to appear on the carpet borders, to mark the latter as symbols of the Sky-Door. In Part I, above, we have already encountered them in their other function as a defensive barrier. In fact, in various parts of the Islamic World, they came to be used along the tops of walls, around mosques and other sacred structures, with just this purpose.¹⁰⁹ Thus, they had a dual role as border patterns on the rugs, and in so doing they serve as prime examples of the fact that any really

effective symbol can be read at several levels, with different layers of meaning. To understand such a multivalent symbol in depth, one must strip away the successive meanings, as in peeling an onion, working down toward some basic core-meaning, which may be found to subsume the rest. Here, the ultimate unifying explanation of the "trefoils" seems to be the figure of the Sunbird, from which they apparently stemmed, since that was considered as both guarding the approach to Heaven and protecting against evil.

At this point, we should note that a few amateur rug-enthusiasts, and one or two Western scholars lacking contact with Eastern thought, have tried to read into the cloud-collar projections their own subjective "meanings," interpreting the outcurving points (the original beaks) as "horns."¹¹⁰ The fact that the lion, as a solar symbol, is almost always shown attacking horned animals, while the griffon-Sunbird is also shown tearing at horned prey, should be enough to demonstrate that neither horned animals, nor their horns alone, were considered auspicious in

¹⁰⁸See note 7, above.

¹⁰⁹Among the many examples of this that I have seen and noted on my travels, from Morocco to India, the most beautiful example is in the inner quarters of the Great Fort at Agra. For another Indian example, see Volwachen, *op. cit.*, pl. 68. There are numerous examples in Cairo; one of these is shown in Henri Martin, *L'Art Musulman*, Paris, 1926, pl. 9, p. 35. Another use for this type of "magic barrier" was around the immediate enclosures of thrones: see *BMB*, 69, fig. 26, p. 54, and fig. 29, p. 56.

¹¹⁰See H. H. Hansen, *Mongol Costumes* (Nationalmuseets Skrifter: Etnografiske Roekke III), Copenhagen, 1950. On pp. 6-8, cloud collars are discussed under the odd name of "tippets," with references to a supposed "horn motif," *Ibid.*, pp. 94-95, has more to say about the "horn motif," citing R. Karutz, *Unter Kirgisen und Turkmenen*, Leipzig, 1911. However there is no real evidence to back up this hypothesis.

the predominantly solar symbolism of Old Iran. There, they could not begin to compare with the Sunbird in magic or mystical significance.¹¹¹

This long persistence of very ancient solar symbolism in Iran and its neighboring lands down into the 16th and 17th centuries, and even into modern times, may seem strange to an Occidental reader, but it can further be explained by referring to Persian Cultural History.

The ancient feeling of reverence for the Sun fitted neatly into the Zoroastrian religious system of Old Iran. Zoroaster taught about the great cosmic battle of Light against Darkness, personified in the conflict between Ormazd, god of Light, and Ahriman, spirit of Darkness—a struggle which was also waged in microcosm within each individual's heart and mind. These old Iranian ideas were given new life in the first millenium A.D. through the teachings of Māni. The Manichaean religion which he founded carried them out across the world: westward as far as the Atlantic Ocean (in North Africa and Southern France), and eastward to the China Sea. In particular, the Uighur Turks of Central Asia were deeply influenced by the Manichaean faith, with its appeal to strive for the forces of Light against the powers of Darkness, and they encouraged the further spread of the religion in China.

These ideas from the ancient religions of Iran, along with ideas of the Divine Light in Christianity (Nestorian, Armenian, and Eastern Orthodox),¹¹² struck roots again in the beliefs of the Sūfis in mediaeval Islam. We can easily trace its influence in the constant references to the Sun—both the actual and the Metaphysical Sun—and to Divine Light in the writings of the Sūfī poets from mediaeval times down to the present.¹¹³ And it was undoubtedly through the Sūfis that this symbolism worked its way up into the Persian court arts during the early Safavid period, when the Kings of Persia themselves were Sūfī mystics. But the early Safavids and their court were also under strong Turkic influence, as we have noted, and the Sunbird itself—in its later development—was more specifically a Turkish symbol. It appeared on the facades of Seljuq buildings in the Middle Ages,¹¹⁴ and in modified forms it turns up in Saracenic heraldry, which developed in the period when the Seljuqs held sway over Syria and Palestine.¹¹⁵

In all of this system of thinking, the Sun—symbolized by the Sunbird¹¹⁶—was held to be the Source of Life, and origin of vitality, prosperity, and all good influences, while the opposing Darkness—symbolized by fish or dragon—brought bad fortune, disease, and death. Thus, the Sunbird was the auspicious symbol par excellence; no other symbol or cluster of symbols could compare with it. And yet, since it had come down as a survival from older religious beliefs, Orthodox Islam could not openly sanction it. Therefore, among the common people, especially in Sunnī areas, it was necessary to mask it by extreme stylizations. This explains why the Sunbird, in one aspect or another, is found so often on Oriental rugs—and on many other things as well—and why it appeared in so many partially concealed, or quite obscure, forms and transformations.

single-headed Sunbirds, of which nos. 2 and 4 have prominent holes in the chest. In Plate III, nos. 1 to 3 are double-headed Sunbirds, while 5 and 13 are single-headed, with voids in the chest. Mayer comments, on p. 9, that the eagle occurs in two varieties—single or double-headed—and that both varieties frequently have what looks like a gash in the chest; not realizing that the tradition required this, he remarks, "it is probably meant to be an ornament only."

¹¹⁶On at least one occasion, the poet Rūmī alludes to the Sun as a bird—or the Sunbird—mentioning "the feathers and pinions of the Sun." See A. J. Arberry, *The Mystical Poems of Rumi*, Chicago, 1968, no. 194, p. 160

¹¹¹These remarks apply to Persia and the broader areas of Iranian cultural influence, not necessarily to Turkestan. In the latter region, the predominantly pastoral economy may have maintained a reverence for horned animals because of old beliefs about increasing the fertility of the flocks and herds, or for "hunting magic."

¹¹²One finds many references to Light in the Gospels, notably John 1:4-9.

¹¹³For a notable reference to the Metaphysical Sun, see the passage from Attar's "Bird Parliament," translated by Edward FitzGerald, quoted in A. J. Arberry (ed.), *Persian Poems*, London & New York, 1954, p. 170.

¹¹⁴On several occasions, I have noted two particularly fine double-headed Sunbirds flanking the gate of the "Twin Minaret Madrasa" in Erzerum, when passing through that town on my way to Iran. One of these is pictured in S. K. Yetkin, *L'Architecture turque en Turquie*, Paris, 1962, plate 16. Here the Sunbird is depicted atop a stylized Tree of Life, below which loom two dragons.

¹¹⁵See L. A. Mayer, *Saracenic Heraldry*, Oxford, 1933. Plate II shows

SYMBOLIC MEANINGS IN ORIENTAL RUG PATTERNS: Part III

Schuyler V.R. Cammann

Persian Five-Medallion Rugs

The world-famous Persian "medallion rugs" of the 16th and early 17th centuries generally share a basic field pattern which is rich in symbolism, quite apart from all the minor elements such as flowers and animals, or even human huntsmen, which fill the background. Their full meaning has eluded modern Western scholars, because the latter have persisted in viewing these patterns as though they were Occidental designs, and, by describing them as such, they have misinterpreted them.

A rather typical description of a famous Safavid medallion carpet states, "The field has at its center a large quatrefoil medallion with trefoils at the points. . . . Each corner of the field contains one quarter of the center quatrefoil medallion with its accompanying quatrefoil and cartouche parts. The design of the quarters corresponds to that of the medallion."¹ Then, having disposed of the "less essential" elements, the writer goes on to give a long description of minor details in the background of the field, which in symbolic terms were far less significant.

The main fault here is that the cataloguer was assuming a limited composition, a self-contained pattern in Western style, neatly adjusted to fill the surface enclosed within the border. However, as we have noted in Part I, the field pattern on most Persian rugs and carpets was a representation of Infinity, in token of which it runs out under the border; and close observation reveals that this is also true of these five-medallion rugs, including the one partially described above. This convention is especially evident on the Ardebil rugs, on which the flowers at the outer edges of the background field are reduced to mere segments by the encroaching border-frame. In view of this, are the four corner designs on the Ardebil carpets (Fig. 19)—or those on the "hunting rugs" from Vienna and Milan (Fig. 20)—actually merely "quarter segments of the central one," as Western descriptions usually say? Or were they intended to represent whole medallions, somehow related to the central one?

Our answer is provided by the incomplete filler designs in the background of these corner elements, cut off by the border as they continue on beneath it, and also by certain requirements of symbolism. From both viewpoints we know that the corner devices have to be considered as mere segments of entire medallions that are figuratively extending out under the border. We can be positive about this, because we are dealing here with a definite symbol-complex that demands the presence of five full medallions: in short, another quincunx.

After the development of the Sun-Gate idea and the quite general representation of it by the Sunbird—or by a reduced form of him in the shape of a ring with double-heads: that is, some version of the cloud-collar—the tendency for related symbols to interchange began to operate again; so some of the symbolism of the Metaphysical Sun got transferred back to the actual Sun, and vice versa. Thus, in time,

¹L. Simon, "Description of the Boston Carpet," *BMB*, 69, p. 82.